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PATRICIA A. WATSON

ANCIENT STEPMOTHERS

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ANCIENT STEPMOTHERS

MYTH, MISOGYNY AND REALITY

BY

PATRICIA A. WATSON

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Coniugi Carissimo

δεινότερον οὐδὲν ἄλλο μητρυιᾶς κακόν (Menander, *Mon.* 189)
('no evil is more dreadful than a stepmother')

'novercae . . . numquam satis privignus occiditur' (Seneca, *Con.* 7.1.9)
('for a stepmother, a stepson is never murdered enough')

CONTENTS

Preface ix

Abbreviations xi

I. Introduction 1
II. Stepmothers in Greek Myth 20
III. Stepmothers in Classical Athens 50
IV. The *Saeva Noverca* in Roman Literature 92
V. Stepmothers in Roman Life 135
VI. Historical Figures: Livia, Agrippina and Octavia 176
VII. Conclusion 207

Appendix One: The Stepmother Myths 223
Appendix Two: Origins of the Stepmothers Myths 239
Appendix Three: The Stepmother in the Folktale 258
Appendix Four: Establishing a List of Inscriptions 267

Selected Bibliography 272

General Index 279

Index of Passages Discussed 285

PREFACE

The proverbial cruelty of stepmothers in ancient Greece and Rome has often been noted, but no complete study of the literary stereotype in its sociological and historical context has been attempted. It is this gap which the present work hopes to fill, as a contribution not only to literary history but to the ever-growing body of studies on women and family relations in the ancient world. Given also the proliferation of research by sociologists in recent years into the impact of divorce and remarriage on intra-family relationships, the work may also be of interest to students of the contemporary stepfamily. For the benefit of the latter, and also of non-specialists with an interest in the ancient world, all Greek and Latin in the text and footnotes has been translated into English, with the exception of a number of key terms which appear frequently. These include a) the Greek νόθος (plural νόθοι)=illegitimate, a bastard; oikos=household; epikleros='heiress', i.e. a daughter whose father has died leaving no legitimate sons; b) words for stepfamily members:

stepmother: Latin *noverca* (plural *novercae*) Greek μητρυιά
stepfather: *vitricus*
stepson: *privignus* or (in inscriptions) *filiaster*
stepdaughter: *privigna* or *filiastra*

Frequent reference has also been made to the stock figure of the *noverca venefica* ('stepmother as poisoner') and the *saeva noverca* (plural *saevae novercae*), for which I have used the common English expression 'cruel stepmother', although the Latin term *saeva* has connotations of savagery and violence as well as cruelty.

I would like to thank Dr. Ursula Keudel of the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae Institute in Munich for her warm welcome and assistance in using the institute library. I am grateful to Professor David Konstan, and to my colleagues Professors Dexter Hoyos and Kevin Lee for advice and encouragement. Thanks are also due to Mr. Julian Deahl and the staff of Brill for their courtesy and efficiency during the production of the book, and to the anonymous referee for helpful comments. Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to my

husband and colleague Dr. Lindsay Watson, without whose continued scholarly criticism and moral support this book would never have seen the light of day.

Sydney,
19th October, 1994.

ABBREVIATIONS

Aarne/Thompson	Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (a translation with enlargements of Antti Aarne: *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (Helsinki: 1928; 2nd rev. 1961)
AC	*L'Antiquité Classique*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt,* ed. H. Temporini (Berlin, 1972–)
Archiv. f. Pap.	*Archiv für Papyrusforschung*
C&M	*Classica et mediaevalia*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin, 1863–)
CJ	*Classical Journal*
CPh	*Classical Philology*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CR	*Classical Review*
EGF	*Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. M. Davies (Göttingen: 1988)
EMC	*Échos du monde classique (Classical Views)*
FGrH	*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby (Berlin/Leiden: 1923; rev. ed. 1957)
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
ICS	*Illinois Classical Studies*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae* (2nd ed. 1873–)
Inscr.christ.	*Inscriptiones latinae christianae veteres* ed. Ernst L. Diehl (Berlin: 1925–31)
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zürich/München: 1981–)
MH	*Museum Helveticum*
Merk-W.	*Hesiodi Theogonia et Dies, Scutum*, ed. F. Solmsen, *Fragmenta Selecta* ed.

	R. Merkelbach and M.L. West (3rd ed., Oxford: 1990)
Not d. scav.	*Notizie degli scavi*
OLD	*The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1968–82)
Oxford English Dictionary	*The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: 2nd ed.,1989)
PCG	*Poetae Comici Graeci*, ed. R. Kassel and C. Austin (Berlin: 1983–)
PCPhS	*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
PMG	*Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. M. Davies Vol 1 (Oxford: 1991)
P Oxy	*The Oxyrhyncus Papyri*, ed. B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, et. al. (London, 1898–)
RE	*Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertums-wissenschaft*, ed. A.Fr. von Pauly, rev. G. Wissowa et al. (Stuttgart, 1894–1980)
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
REL	*Revue des Études Latines*
RhM	*Rheinisches Museum*
RPh	*Revue de Philologie*
Roscher	W.H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie*, (Leipzig: 1897–1909)
SIG	*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* ed. W. Dittenberger (3rd. ed. Leipzig: 1920)
TAPhA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TGF²	*Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. A. Nauck (2nd ed. Leipzig: 1926)
TLL	*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Leipzig, 1900–)
TrGF IV	*Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. S. Radt, Vol 4 (Göttingen: 1977)
WS	*Wiener Studien*
YCS	*Yale Classical Studies*
ZRG	*Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtgeschichte (Romanistische Abteilung)*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Is that your *stepmother*?" "Yes." [after a pause] "Oh. I aways thought a stepmother was something like a witch."

"Oh boy, I could tell you some stories about stepmothers. I have clients who relate tales that would make your hair stand on end. Really, some of them have been absolutely brutalized by their stepmothers. I think they must be bred in a special place. They can't be human."

These statements are not the product of a less enlightened age, but were recorded in England in the 1970's[1] and Australia in the 1980's.[2] Moreover, they were made at a time when the divorce rate, at least in Western countries, is so high that a larger number of children than ever before have a stepmother, whether full or part-time. Yet, as the two quotations above clearly demonstrate, the stereotype of the 'wicked stepmother', common in both the ancient world and in more recent times, persists even today. The first quotation, from a conversation between two young girls, suggests that a child's perception of the stepmother is still formed on the basis of fairy tales such as *Cinderella* and *Hansel and Gretel*, or perhaps from the ever-popular Walt Disney cartoon of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, with its memorable witch-stepmother.[3] The second statement is even more interesting, since the speaker—a middle-aged (male) psychiatrist—does not have the double excuse of inexperience and the inability to view matters except from a child's perspective. Several sensitive treatments of the problems facing stepfamilies have been published in recent years:[4] they invariably emphasise the existence of a universal prejudice against stepmothers which is so strong that all stepmothers are

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[1] Maddox (1975) 16. On the child's definition of the stepmother as a witch, cf. also Smith (1990) 29.

[2] Conolly (1983) 70.

[3] Initially the stepmother is depicted as an attractive, though insecure, woman approaching middle age, but it is the image of the ugly old woman, complete with pointed hat (the disguise adopted by the stepmother in order to trick Snow White into accepting the poisoned apple), which makes a lasting visual impact.

[4] E.g. Maddox (1975), Conolly (1983), Hodder (1985), Ochiltree (1990). In addition, books have been written primarily to help stepmothers cope with the difficulties of their situation, e.g. Burns (1985), Smith (1990) and, from a feminist perspective, Nan B. Maglin and Nancy Schniedewind edd., *Women and Stepfamilies*

still, to a greater or lesser extent, its victims.[5] Given these circumstances, a study of the 'wicked stepmother' in ancient Greece and Rome has particular relevance for our own day, especially as the number of stepfamilies in Western countries is ever increasing: it has been estimated, for instance, that between 1/4 and 1/3 of all children born in the USA in the 1980's are likely to spend at least some of their childhood years in this type of family.[6] Moreover, the image of the stepmother frequently encountered in the ancient texts is, as I shall demonstrate, an encapsulation of the negative traits assigned to females in general by a misogynistic tradition which flourished in Greece and Rome and is by no means extinct. The following study, then, is also of importance as a notable illustration of how prejudice against women may inform the creation of a stereotype.

The prominence of the *saeva noverca* in the Roman Declamation and in Latin literature as a whole has led most scholars to regard the malevolence of stepmothers as a peculiarly Roman obsession.[7] While the poisoning stepmother as a stock character type may be regarded as characteristically Roman, malign stepmothers are by no means absent from Greek literature. In particular, individual examples of the type appeared frequently on the Tragic stage, and in a greater variety of situations than their Roman counterparts. Not only do we encounter murderous stepmothers such as Ino, Medea and Creusa, who plot against the life of stepsons, but there are also characters

(Philadelphia: 1989). All the above authors have first-hand experience either as stepmothers or stepdaughters.

[5] Smith (1990) 2, for instance, explains that "one of my principal aims in writing the book was to liberate stepmothers from their 'wicked' fairy tale image".

[6] Donald J. Hernandez, "Demographic Trends and the Living Arrangements of Children" in *Impact of Divorce, Single Parenting and Stepparenting on Children*, ed. E.M. Hetherington and J.D. Arasteh (New Jersey: 1988) 20, estimates 1/3–1/2; P.C. Glick, "Marriage, divorce and living arrangements: Prospective changes", *Journal of Family Issues* 5 (1984), 7–26, says 35%. Recent figures show that these estimates may be exaggerated: divorce rates have declined in the USA and in Australia, though the number of stepfamilies is still significantly high (cf. Ochiltree (1990) 5, J. Southward in the newspaper *The Sun-Herald* (Sydney, November 15, 1992), 149).

[7] E.g. Winterbottom (1974) 454–55 n. 3, Edward Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London: 1980) on Juv., 6.627, Gray-Fow (1988), 741–757. Noy (1991), 345–61, recognises the presence of stepmothers in Greek literature, though mainly in order to demonstrate the difference between Greek texts, where stepdaughters as well as stepsons are found, and Roman, which concentrate on the poisoning stepmother who removes her *stepson* to gain an inheritance. Though this point is well taken, the inheritance motif is also prominent, as I will show, in the Greek myths.

straight out of folktale like Sidero, whose malevolence is manifested in the cruel treatment of a stepdaughter, as well as stepmothers of the Phaedra kind, smitten with an adulterous passion for their stepson. In almost every case, these figures share certain characteristic traits based on a common perception of stepmothers as a class.[8]

In subsequent chapters the literary figure of the evil stepmother will be examined in detail, first in Greek myth and literature, then in her peculiarly Roman manifestation. Though the treatment varies, in both cases the portrayal of the stepmother has its basis in certain underlying attitudes towards stepmothers in general. In order to lay the groundwork for further discussion, I shall begin by investigating the nature of these attitudes.

In the first place, the belief was commonly held among both Greeks and Romans that malevolence on the part of the stepmother towards her stepchildren was a necessary consequence of the steprelationship. This is best illustrated by the widespread use of both μητρυιά and *noverca* in a transferred sense to symbolise hostility, often in contrast to motherly love and concern.[9] As early as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the observation that some days are μετάδουποι, i.e. cannot be classed as either lucky or unlucky, is illustrated metaphorically by saying that such a day is sometimes a stepmother, sometimes a mother.[10] In a fable of Aesop (121) a gardener, when asked why vegetables growing

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[8] The loss of most of the Attic tragedies whose plot revolved around the machinations of a wicked stepmother explains why the stereotype has been commonly considered a Roman rather than a Greek phenomenon. If such plays as Sophocles' *Tyro* or Euripides' *Phoenix*, *Aegeus* or the first *Hippolytus* were available in their entirety, a different impression would be gained of the rôle played by the stepmother in Greek literature.

[9] The same phenomenon still occurs today: in Scotland, for instance, a year of death or privation is known as a 'stepmother year' (*The Scottish National Dictionary*, cited by Smith (1990) 15); cf. the Italian 'la natura gli fu matrigna'—'nature was cruel to him', the French 'être marâtre pour quelqu'un' = 'to treat someone harshly or unkindly'; the Spanish word for stepmother—*madrastra*—also means 'something disagreeable'. In French the term *marâtre* always refers to a wicked stepmother (when a neutral sense is required the euphemistic term *belle-mère*, which also means 'mother-in-law', is used). *The Oxford English Dictionary* vol XVI s.v. 'stepdame' and 'stepmother' gives numerous earlier examples e.g. (Purvey, 14th century) 'necligence is stepdame of lernynge', (Carlyle, 19th century) 'what a tragic, treacherous stepdame is vulgar Fortune to her children!' In the 19th century, a hang-nail was known colloquially as a 'stepmother's blessing' or simply a 'stepmother'.

[10] *αἱ δ' ἄλλαι μετάδουποι*, ἀκήριοι, οὔ τι φέρουσαι. / ἄλλος δ'ἀλλοίην αἰνεῖ, παῦροι δὲ ἴσασιν. / ἄλλοτε μητρυιὴ πέλει ἡμέρη, ἄλλοτε μήτηρ/ τάων "but other days are of uncertain omen, doomless, not bringing anything. . . ./ each man recommends different days, but few are aware of this: that a day of this type is sometimes a mother, sometimes a stepmother" *Op.* 823–5.

in the wild are flourishing while those under cultivation are not, replies that the earth is a mother to the former but a stepmother to the latter. Similarly, in the *Prometheus Vinctus* (727) the term μητρυιά is imaginatively applied to a harbour that is treacherous to ships. The stepmother / mother contrast, seen in the first two examples cited above, becomes a popular conceit: later examples include Plato, *Menex.* 237b.7 (men who are natives of a country are said to have been raised by a mother, immigrants by a stepmother)[11] and *AP* 9.23 (by Antipater, from the Garland of Philip: a dying father advises his sons to take up farming rather than sailing, since the former is sweeter than the other in the same way that a mother is sweeter than a stepmother). To take some Roman examples: Pliny (*Nat.* 7.1.1) comments that it is doubtful whether Nature has been a better mother to man or a more disagreeable stepmother (*tristior noverca*), and at *Nat.* 17.18 the shade of different trees is said to be either *nutrix* ('nurse') or *noverca* (cf. Claud., *Rape of Per.* 3.40, in which Nature complains she has been made a *dura noverca* ('harsh stepmother') to men, and Prop., 4.5.10 where the powers of the *lena* ('procuress')/witch to invert nature are exemplified by her capacity to make a mother bird become a *noverca* to its young). A most striking exploitation of the notion of stepmotherly malignity is contained in the use of *noverca* as a technical term: in military parlance, it was applied to any place thought risky for pitching camp, such as a site near an overhanging mountain from which the enemy could spy, or a forest in which they could hide.[12]

A final example of the belief that stepmothers are automatically hostile to their stepchildren is worth discussing at greater length, since it illustrates a fundamental assumption underlying the notion of stepmotherly hatred, namely, that this has nothing to do with the child itself, but is simply a product of the relationship. The subject of the Senecan *Controversia* 4.6 is as follows: a father has sent his two sons by different wives to be raised in the country; years later ('post longum tempus') the young men are recalled and the second wife begs her husband to tell her which of the children is her own (the

[11] Cf. Artemidorus, *Oneiro.* 3.26: to dream of one's step-parent can mean a foreign trip or residence in a foreign land, since parents represent one's own country, step-parents a foreign country.

[12] [Hyg.], *Met.Castr.* 57. *Noverca* was originally a technical term of the Gromatici (land-surveyors) and was taken over from them into the language of the camp: see M.G. Mosci Sassi, *Il Sermo castrensis* (Bologna: 1983) 141.

half-brothers cannot be distinguished by their appearance—apparently they both took after their male parent);[13] the father refuses, and is accused by his wife of ill-treatment (the *actio malae tractionis*). The central argument cited in the father's defence is that he acted in the interests of his elder son: if his wife is granted her wish she will begin to view the boy through stepmotherly eyes;[14] she is also reminded that she is uniquely privileged among stepmothers in having a stepson but not being in a position to behave in a stepmotherly fashion towards him ("uni tibi contigit ut habeas privignum et non sis noverca" "to you alone it has befallen that you have a stepson and are not a stepmother").[15] Implicit in these arguments is the assumption that as soon as the stepmother discovers the identity of her stepson she will hate him as a matter of course even though she has only just met him for the first time.[16]

The idea that stepmotherly hatred is inevitable has three corollaries. First, the feeling existed that a man who was a father ought not to take another wife, lest he inflict a stepmother on his children.[17] This is exemplified by Plato's advice against remarriage in the case of a widower with children.[18] Given that the aim of marriage was to produce citizens for the state (and Plato encourages childless widowers

[13] To make the story somewhat less improbable, however, it is specified that the second marriage and birth of the second son took place soon after the death of the first wife in childbirth: thus the boys cannot be more than a year or two apart in age.

[14] This seems implicit in the statement "'hic tuus est': quid alterum novercalibus oculis intueris?" ("'this one is yours': why are you looking at the other with the eyes of a stepmother?").

[15] Notice that here the word *noverca* must be taken in the sense of *saeva noverca*: like the French *marâtre*, it means someone who is a stepmother in both name and deed.

[16] The idea is similarly exploited by Euripides in the *Ion*, where Creusa's initial reaction to Ion is favourable: when told that he is her stepchild, her natural feelings (natural, because she is really his mother) are quelled by stepmotherly hatred and she plots his destruction.

[17] Cf. W. Erdman, *Die Ehe in alten Griechenland* (1934, reprinted New York: 1979) 403ff.

[18] *Leg.* 930b: ἐὰν δὲ τελευτᾷ γυνὴ καταλείπουσα παῖδας θηλείας τε καὶ ἄρρενας, συμβουλευτικὸς ἂν εἴη νόμος ὁ τιθέμενος, οὐκ ἀναγκαστικός, τρέφειν τοὺς ὄντας παῖδας μὴ μητρυιὰν ἐπαγόμενον ("and if a man's wife dies leaving female and male children, let there be a law, advisory but not compulsory, stipulating that he should rear the existing children and not introduce a stepmother"). Note the mention of female as well as male children, a feature conditioned by Plato's relatively enlightened views on the position of women in the state.

to remarry for this reason), it is significant that the philosopher regards the risk of stepmotherly malevolence as so high as to outweigh any potential benefit to the state in the form of offspring from the second marriage. Diodorus Siculus,[19] quoting from two writers of New Comedy,[20] attributes to Charondas a law which disfranchised fathers imposing a stepmother on their children, on the grounds that anyone who treated his own offspring in such a callous fashion could hardly be expected to have the interests of the state at heart. It is likely that if such a law existed in reality, it merely imposed a penalty (e.g. loss of the right to make a will[21]) on men who remarried while having offspring from a previous marriage, and more importantly, that it was designed to protect the interests of the children of the first marriage rather than to attack stepmothers.[22] Diodorus' assumption that the imposition of a stepmother on one's children involves parental cruelty reflects not so much the attitude of the lawgiver towards stepmothers as that of the Comic poets which he cites,[23]

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[19] 12.12–14; cf. Stob., Vol. 4 p.154WH: ὁ μητρυιὰν ἐπιγαμῶν μὴ εὐδοξείτω, ἀλλ' ὀνειδιζέσθω ὡς παραίτιος ὢν οἰκείας διαστάσεως "let a man who remarries and imposes a stepmother (on his children) not be of good repute, but let him be reproached as contributing to dissension in his house".

[20] Philemon and an unnamed poet (fr. adesp. 110 Kock).

[21] This is the suggestion of Lacey (1968) 226 n. 59.

[22] The law may not have been by Charondas himself. The historical Charondas was a Sicilian lawgiver of the 7th or 6th centuries BC; since Diodorus states that Charondas made laws for Thurii in the mid 5th century, it has been suggested that Diodorus is following a later Alexandrian tradition which attempted to connect Charondas with Pythagorean philosophy and also attributed to him laws of a different kind to the practical codes which are more characteristic of early law-givers. F.E. Adcock, "Literary tradition and early Greek code-makers", *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 2.2 (1927), 103ff., suggested that there may have been a law either at Catana (Charondas' hometown) or Thurii which protected the rights of the children of a first marriage, and which was later attributed to Charondas as part of an attempt to turn him into an ideal, rather than a practical, lawgiver. Cf. also Lacey (1968) 224, 226. Jolowitz (1947), 82, 90, regards the law as a fiction, but he refuses to acknowledge *any* relationship between the literary figure of the stepmother and real life.

[23] Fr. Adesp. 110 Kock:

ὁ παισὶν αὐτοῦ μητρυιὰν ἐπεισάγων
μήτ' εὐδοκιμείτω μήτε μετεχέτω λόγου
παρὰ τοῖς πολίταις, ὡς ἐπείσακτον κακὸν
κατὰ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ πραγμάτων πεπορισμένος.
εἶτ' ἐπέτυχες γάρ, φησί, γήμας τὸ πρότερον,
εὐημερῶν κατάπαυσον· εἶτ' οὐκ ἐπέτυχες,
μανικὸν τὸ πεῖραν δευτέρας λαβεῖν πάλιν.

as well as that of Diodorus himself.[24] A similar notion is expressed in the impassioned plea of Alcestis that Admetus should not remarry after her death:

καὶ μὴ'πιγήμῃς τοῖσδε μητρυιὰν τέκνοις
ἥτις κακίων οὖσ' ἐμοῦ γυνὴ φθόνῳ
τοῖς σοῖσι κἀμοῖς παισὶ χεῖρα προσβαλεῖ.
μὴ δῆτα δράσῃς ταῦτά γ', αἰτοῦμαί σ' ἐγώ.
ἐχθρὰ γὰρ ἡ'πιοῦσα μητρυιὰ τέκνοις
τοῖς πρόσθ', ἐχίδνης οὐδὲν ἠπιωτέρα

and do not remarry and impose on these children a stepmother,
who, being a woman more ill-intentioned than me through jealousy
will lay hands on your children and mine.
please do not do this, I entreat you.
for a stepmother comes as an enemy to the children
of a former union and is no more gentle than a viper
(Eur., *Alc.* 305–10).[25]

Passing to Rome, Ovid exploits the idea that remarriage posed a threat to the children of the first marriage when he has Medea use the proverbial malevolence of stepmothers as an argument against Jason marrying Creusa (*Ep.* 12.187f.: "communis respice natos;/ saeviet in partus dira noverca meos" "have regard for the children we have in common;/ a dreadful stepmother will act violently towards my offspring").[26] Note also the reason given by the author of the *Historia*

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let he who imposes a stepmother on his children
not be of good repute, nor let him count for anything
among his fellow citizens, as one who has brought an evil
from outside onto his affairs.
For, he says, if you married happily the first time,
stop while you're lucky, or else if your marriage was not happy,
it's crazy to try taking a second wife.

These words might have occurred in the context of a widower considering remarriage.

[24] Clearly Diodorus is in agreement with the poets: he intersperses comments of his own, e.g. that it is foolish to make the same mistake twice and that the most serious quarrels between fathers and sons are caused by stepmothers (12.14).

[25] Cf. Euripides, *TGF*² F338 (from the *Dictys*) in which Dictys, as one of his arguments to dissuade his brother Polydectes against marriage with Danae (so Webster (1967) 64), says that if he remarries, having children already, he will be involving his children in very great hatred (presumably the hatred of a stepmother). And when Theseus sees the note hanging from the dead Phaedra's hand, his immediate assumption is that it contains a request not to remarry, for the sake of their children (Eur., *Hipp.* 858ff.).

[26] Seneca, taking his lead from Ovid, also utilises the theme: at *Med.* 845ff. the

Augusta for Marcus Aurelius' decision not to remarry after the death of his wife Faustina: he preferred to take a concubine in order not to impose a stepmother on his many children.[27]

A second corollary of the notion that stepmothers are automatically ill-disposed towards their stepchildren is that a stepmother who treats her stepchildren in a kindly manner will be a rarity; one who loves them even rarer still. When a stepmother is good, she receives excessive laudation for behaving contrary to expectation (cf. Ov., *Ep.* 4.140: Phaedra, attempting to seduce Hippolytus, suggests that if they kiss in public she will be praised for being a *fida noverca* 'loyal stepmother');[28] alternatively, the praise is circumscribed. For instance, Seneca, addressing his mother Helvia who was brought up by a stepmother, remarks:

> crevisti sub noverca, quam tu quidem omni obsequio et pietate, quanta vel in filia conspici potest, matrem fieri coegisti, nulli tamen non magno constitit etiam bona noverca

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children of Medea are told: "ite, ite, nati, matris infaustae genus,/ placate vobis munere et multa prece/ dominam ac novercam" ("go, go, my sons, brood of an ill-omened mother,/ appease by a gift and many a prayer your mistress and stepmother"). Somewhat similar is Hypsipyle's remark that she was about to send her children by Jason to their father but was deterred by the thought of the *saeva noverca* (Medea) to whom she would be thereby entrusting them (Ovid, *Ep.* 6.126 "tenuit coeptas saeva noverca vias" "[the thought of] a cruel stepmother held up the course on which I had embarked"). In this case the usual fear evoked by a stepmother is exacerbated by the fact that Medea is already a practised murderess who has killed her own brother—"plus est Medea noverca; / Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus./ Spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros/ corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis?" ("Medea is more than a stepmother;/ Medea's hands turn to every sort of crime./ would she refrain from my children, when she was able to scatter over the lands her brother's body, torn to pieces?" 127f.).

[27] S. H. A. *Marc.* 29.10: "enisa est Fabia ut Faustina mortua in eius matrimonium coiret. Sed ille concubinam sibi adscivit procuratoris uxoris suae filiam, ne tot liberis superduceret novercam". "After Faustina's death, Fabia made efforts to get married to him. But he took the daughter of his wife's steward as a concubine, in order to avoid imposing a stepmother on so many children". The excuse is suspect: 'tot' ('so many') suggests that the writer has in mind Aurelius' large family of 8 boys and 6 girls, but he has overlooked the fact that by the time of his wife Faustina's death only 1 male and 5 female children survived, four of whom were married and thus would not be under the care of the stepmother (which is implied by the verb *superduco* (lit. 'lead over', i.e. impose on). It is said that the 54-year-old emperor Aurelius was greatly distressed at Faustina's death; he may have simply preferred not to replace her with another wife, and the reason given by the historian for his decision tells us more about the author's bias against stepmothers than of Marcus' feelings in the matter. See Anthony Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: A Biography*, (Newhaven: rev. ed., 1987) 196.

[28] Cf. also the attitude of historians to Octavia, stepmother of Antony's children. For discussion, see chapter 6.

> you grew up under a stepmother, and through all possible obedience and dutifulness, as much as can be seen even in a daughter, you certainly compelled her to become a mother, yet there is no one to whom even a good stepmother does not cost dear.[29]

Note that the credit for the stepmother being *bona* ('good') is given entirely to the stepdaughter. Similarly, in contexts where a mother is about to pass on her children to a stepmother, either through death or divorce, she is made to warn the children to do all in their power to win the favour of their new *noverca*. At Sen., *Med.* 847, for instance, Medea sends her sons with gifts to Creusa, giving them instructions to appease thereby their *noverca* and *domina* ('mistress'). In Propertius' final elegy (4.11.86) the dead Cornelia, speaking from her tomb, advises her children, should their father remarry,[30] not to make comparisons between herself and the new stepmother as this will cause her to beat them. The advice of both Medea and Cornelia to their children is based on the assumption that a stepmother's behaviour may only be modified by efforts on the part of the stepchildren.

The examples just cited from Seneca and Propertius illustrate a third corollary arising from the notion that stepmothers are invariably hostile towards their stepchildren: that the stepchild is essentially an innocent victim. With one exception,[31] Greek and Roman writers treat the steprelationship exclusively from the perspective of the stepchild rather than the stepmother. Hence it is the stepmother who is imagined as harbouring negative feelings towards her stepchild rather than the reverse.[32] Even in those rare instances where a stepson cherishes feelings of animosity towards his stepmother, he is shown to be motivated not by hatred which has arisen spontaneously, but by a desire to avenge the wrongs she has done him. A

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[29] Sen., *Helv.* 2.4; cf. Sen., *Con.* 9.6.6 "habui filium tam bonum ut illum amare posset etiam noverca" ("I had a son who was so good that even a stepmother could have loved him").

[30] They did, in fact, acquire a stepmother (Marcella, the younger daughter of Augustus' sister Octavia), though since their father, Paullus Aemilius Lepidus, died shortly after and Marcella remarried, they did not have to endure her for very long: see Syme (1939) 378. It is interesting to compare this poem with Euripides' *Alcestis*, where Alcestis asks her husband not to remarry for the sake of their children. A Roman matron of the nobility would not make such as request, especially as the poem was written not long after the first of Augustus' marriage laws which encouraged remarriage among the wealthy in particular.

[31] See next paragraph on Jerome.

[32] Modern studies of stepfamilies point out that children are just as likely to resent their stepmother: for discussion see chapter 3.

good example is found in Sen., *Con.* 4.5, where a physician, charged with refusing to treat his ailing stepmother, offers as an excuse for his behaviour the fear that, if anything went wrong, it would be assumed he had murdered his stepmother by way of retribution for prior maltreatment.[33]

The only writer to present us with a stepmother's point of view is Jerome, ironically in a passage which is frequently cited to illustrate the typical Roman attitude to stepmothers. The passage, which attests to the popularity of the *saeva noverca* in Comedy and Mime and as a rhetorical commonplace, comes at the end of a letter in which the writer offers arguments in favour of celibacy to a widow contemplating remarriage. It offers us a rare sympathetic insight into the plight of a woman faced with becoming a stepmother. Jerome's aim is not to attack *novercae* but to demonstrate the disadvantages of remarriage from the woman's viewpoint. If a widow has persuaded herself that she needs a husband to safeguard her affairs, she should think again, says Jerome, for she will inflict on her children not a stepfather, but an enemy, not a parent, but a tyrant. He will trick her into making a will in his favour; if they have children, he will resent any show of affection on her part towards her children from her first marriage, since he will jealously take this as a sign that she still loves her first husband. Finally, and worst of all, if he has children himself from an earlier marriage, then no matter how hard she tries to be kind, she will be unable to avoid being labelled a wicked stepmother, so frequently is the stereotype portrayed on the stage and in Rhetoric.[34] Her situation will be especially intolerable should a stepson fall ill: if she fails to feed him she will be called cruel, if she gives him food, on the other hand, it will be assumed to be poisoned. This letter is unusual in that characteristics elsewhere attributed to stepmothers, such as trickery and jealousy, are here assigned to the stepfather. Jerome is, of course, presenting a Christian view, which discouraged widows from taking a second husband (great emphasis is placed, for instance, on how a woman who remar-

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[33] Cf. the desire for vengeance on the part of both Ion and Theseus (see chapter 2 n. 52).

[34] "Omnes comoediae et mimographi et communes loci in novercam saevissimam declamabunt" ("every Comedy and all the writers of Mimes and every rhetorical cliché will speak out against the very cruel stepmother" *Ep.* 54.15.4). Cf. the stepmother in the declamation (Quint., *Decl.* 327 (discussed in chapter 4) who wants to avoid the *fabulae novercarum* ('stories about stepmothers').

ries is sacrificing her chastity for the sake of carnal pleasure or greed)[35]—the pagan Romans, by contrast, however much they may have lauded the ideal of the *univira* (i.e. a woman who knows only one husband), did not disapprove of remarriage for a woman, and Augustus' marriage legislation actively encouraged it, at least for women of childbearing age.[36] Nonetheless Jerome's letter is important for its understanding of the fact that many stepmothers, despite their best efforts, were branded *saevae novercae* ('cruel stepmothers') by the strength of the stereotype, which was so widely disseminated that they were inevitably its victims.

I have been discussing the assumption that stepmothers are invariably hostile towards their stepchildren, and three corollaries which arise from this. Two further questions merit consideration, namely the motivation thought to underly this hostility and the forms it typically assumes.

Often, stepmotherly behaviour is shown as arising from simple, unmotivated spite. Where a reason is specified, or can be assumed, the most frequent cause of malevolence is jealousy on the part of the stepmother that another woman's son[37] will be her husband's heir. As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, this motivation underlies many of the myths involving stepmothers, and is especially prominent in the Latin Declamation. It is also attributed to stepmothers as a class in passages such as Ovid, *Met.* 1.147 (discussed below) and Horace, *Odes* 3.24 where, in pointed contrast to Rome, Horace extols the simple but morally innocent life led by the Getae

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> inflammata libidine obliviscitur uteri sui . . . nulla idcirco ducit maritum, ut cum marito non dormiat. aut si certe libido non stimulat, quae tanta insania est in morem scortorum prostituere castitatem, ut augeantur divitiae et propter rem vilem atque perituram pudicitia, quae et pretiosa et aeterna est, polluatur §2
>
> inflamed with lust she forgets the children of her womb... no woman takes a husband in order not to sleep with the husband. or if at any rate she isn't driven by lust, what great madness is it to prostitute her chastity in the manner of a whore, in order that her wealth might be increased and that, for the sake of something of little value and destined to perish, her virtue, which is precious and everlasting, might be desecrated.

36 Cf. Mette-Dittmann (1991) 182–4.

37 The stereotypic abused stepchild is male. Some myths, e.g. Sidero and Tyro, involve a stepdaughter: on the supposed reasons for malevolence in such cases see the discussion of the myth in chapter 2.

and Scythians, who share equally among the people what little wealth is available. In the absence of material greed—the prime motivation for immoral behaviour on the part of wives—the integrity of the family unit is preserved among these races: as a result no well-dowered wife lauds it over her husband, no wife is attracted by a smartly turned out (*nitidus*) adulterer, and—the point at issue here—stepmothers do not mistreat their stepsons. In the context, stepmotherly malevolence is clearly regarded as provoked by a desire to get the inheritance away from the children of the first marriage.

Stepmotherly hostility is manifested in various ways, ranging from the mild idea of niggardliness at one end of the scale to homicidal behaviour at the other. At Plaut., *Pseud.* 314, Ballio expresses his refusal to comply with a request for financial assistance with the words "you are making your complaint [i.e. lack of money] to a *noverca*". The notion of stinginess is likewise implicit in the use of *noverca* by the land-surveyors (*gromatici*) to denote a type of canal employed for drainage and also to mark the boundaries of a piece of land; it was so named because it was designed to let out only a limited, i.e. niggardly, amount of water, to prevent the land drying out too much.[38]

At the other extreme, stepmotherly hostility may assume the form of murderous activities. In Greek literature these are most often attested in myths involving stepmothers such as the treacherous Ino. References to the murderous propensities of stepmothers as a class are also found, however. In Euripides' *Ion*, for instance, where Creusa plans to murder her son Ion in the mistaken belief that he is her husband's offspring by another woman, her decision to make the attempt at Delphi (where the action of the play takes place), rather than to wait till Ion's arrival at her home in Athens, is explained in terms of the sinister reputation of stepmothers in general: since stepmothers proverbially hate their stepchildren, it would be impossible for her to deny her guilt if the deed were to be performed in her own house.[39] Likewise, a general statement about stepmotherly

[38] See A. Rudorff in *Die Schriften der Romischen Feldmesser*, ed. F. Blume, K. Lachmann and A. Rudorff (Berlin: 1852) 269f.

[39] Line 1024: the servant charged with administering the poison in Athens hesitates because she would be suspected even if she did not perform the deed with her own hand: Creusa agrees (ὀρθῶς· φθονεῖν γάρ φασι μητρυιὰς τέκνοις "that's right, for they say that stepmothers resent the children"), adding that she would be able to deny the deed if it were done in Delphi. *Cf.* the remark of the Pythia to Ion (1329) προγονοῖς δάμαρτες δυσμενεῖς ἀεί ποτε "wives are always ill-disposed towards their stepchildren".

hatred occurs in a fragment of Euripides' *Phrixos*,[40] which has as its theme the story of Ino's attempted murder of her stepchildren (*TGF*² F 824 ὡς οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς φασὶ μητρυιὰς φρονεῖν / νόθοισι παισίν... "they say that stepmothers do not have any kind thoughts towards their husband's bastards"). At Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 1.813–5, Hypsipyle tells Jason a false tale about how the menfolk neglected their wives and families, preferring captured women and not caring, among other things, whether their daughters are murdered by their wicked stepmothers. Finally, an epigram from the *Garland of Philip* is particularly interesting, since the reputation of stepmothers for homicidal behaviour is made the subject of a joke: normally the stepmother is regarded as too dreadful to be treated except with deadly seriousness. The poem, which concerns an instance of stepmotherly malevolence from beyond the grave, is worth quoting in full:

Στήλην μητρυιῆς, μικρὰν λίθον, ἔστεφε κοῦρος,
  ὡς βίον ἠλλάχθαι, καὶ τρόπον οἰόμενος.
ἡ δὲ τάφῳ κλινθέντα κατέκτανε παῖδα πεσοῦσα.
  φεύγετε μητρυιῆς καὶ τάφον οἱ πρόγονοι.

A boy was garlanding[41] the grave pillar of his stepmother, a small stone,
  thinking that in changing life for death she had changed her character.
But the pillar fell and killed the boy as he was bending over the grave.
  O stepsons, avoid even the grave of a stepmother!

AP 9.67.[42]

The epigram just cited, it will be noted, is from the Roman period, and it is in Latin texts that the stepmother as murderess acquires special prominence. The earliest example comes from the *Pro Cluentio* where Cicero, in a memorable phrase, calls the notorious Sassia her son's stepmother (*noverca fili*), a reference to her attempts to remove her son Cluentius by having him convicted of the murder of his stepfather Oppianicus.[43] At *Georgics* 2.128, stepmothers as a class make

[40] It is uncertain whether this fragment belongs to the first or second of Euripides' two *Phrixus* plays (on which, see Appendix 1).

[41] Or 'honouring with libations': see Page (1981) 361.

[42] The epigram is sometimes attributed to Callimachus; Callimachean authorship was rejected by Page (1981) 361, who ascribes it on stylistic grounds to the *Garland of Philip* (anonymous epigrams no. LVII).

[43] §199: Cicero is, of course, playing on the fact that Sassia is the mother of Cluentius: she is acting unnaturally as a stepmother to her own son ("... ea crudelitas ut nemo matrem appellare possit. Atque etiam nomina necessitudinum, non solum

their first appearance in Latin literature as sinister employers of poisons: citron, an antidote to poison, is said by Virgil to be efficacious "pocula si quando saevae infecere novercae" ("if ever cruel stepmothers have imbued the cups with poison"). (The phrase *saeva noverca*, apparently coined by Virgil in this passage, becomes a stock term, taken up by Ovid, and frequently used in the poetry of the empire[44]). Stepmotherly behaviour is also included by Ovid in a list of examples illustrating the arrival of the Iron Age and the subsequent perversion of normal human relationships:[45] note again the theme of poison, expressed in the most graphic of terms: "lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae" ("terrible stepmothers mix deadly aconite"). For the theme of the poisoning stepmother we may also compare Juvenal's remark that moral decay has advanced so far, with mothers poisoning their own children, that it is now considered *fas* ('lawful') for a stepmother to kill her *privignus*.[46] The figure of the *saeva noverca* as poisoner is undoubtedly influenced by the Declamation where this type abounds.[47] So common, indeed, is the association of stepmothers with murder that the term *noverca* (and the related adjective *novercalis)* can be used as a synonym for 'murderess'. In Horace's 5th *Epode* the young boy who is to be used as a human

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naturae nomen et iura mutavit: uxor generi, noverca filii, filiae pelex" "such cruelty that no one could call her a mother. And she has changed even the names of family relationships, not merely the name and laws of nature: the wife of her son-in-law, the stepmother of her son, the rival of her daughter"). Note that the circumstances surrounding Sassia's marriage to Oppianicus are made to seem suspicious by suggesting the stepmother theme: she refused at first to marry him, says Cicero, because he had three sons by previous marriages; accordingly, he removed two of them (27). Similarly, Sallust (*Cat.* 15) alleged that Catiline killed his son because his intended bride hesitated to marry him 'timens privignum adulta aetate' (being afraid of a grown-up stepson'). Later sources accept Sallust's version, e.g. Val. Max., 9.1.9 says that Catiline, by poisoning his son, gave his *orbitas* ('childlessness') to his new bride as a wedding gift—suggesting, perhaps, that he performed the deed which she would have done herself if the son were still alive after the marriage.

[44] E.g. Ov., *Ep.* 6.126., Sen., *Phaed.* 360., [Sen.] *Oct.* 21., Quint., *Inst.* 2.10.5., Val. Fl., 1.287, 3.580, 5.188., Stat., *Silv.* 2.1.49.

[45] Ov., *Met.* 1.147. At the end of Catullus' epyllion on a similar theme (64.402) a *noverca* features, though the situation is probably that of the 'amorous stepmother' (on which see further below). For this passage, see further discussion in chapter 5.

[46] Juv., 6.627. At Stat., *Silv.* 2.1.49 and 5.2.80, the proverbial malignity of stepmothers is mentioned as a paradigm along with snakes, perhaps an implicit reference to the connection of stepmothers with poison. Cf. also Claud., *Bell. Gil.* 1.173f.: Gildo, a poisoner, investigates poisons and serpents' venom and 'adhuc ignota novercis/gramina' ('herbs as yet unknown to stepmothers').

[47] See discussion in chapter 4. I will argue there that even the passages in Virgil and Horace may be influenced by the declamation, the beginnings of which coincide with the date of the *Georgics* and the *Epodes*.

sacrifice in the magic rites of Canidia and her cronies cries "quid ut noverca me intueris?" "why are you looking at me like a stepmother?" (line 9): to look at someone 'like a stepmother' implies 'like a murderess'. Again, at Sen., *Her.F.* 1236 Hercules calls his own hands, after they have been used to kill his children, *novercales manus* ('a stepmother's hands').[48]

The propensity of Latin writers to paint the stepmother in the blackest of terms may suggest that among the Romans negative feelings about stepmothers were especially strong. This is reinforced by purely semantic considerations. Unlike the Greek μητρυιά, which in itself suggests no more than a substitute mother, the word *noverca* contains negative associations which are bound up with the etymology of the word. Now it has often been pointed out, in connection with the English term 'stepmother', that the prefix 'step' has negative connotations, both in terms of the actual etymology from the Old English *stéop*, with its associations of bereavement,[49] and in the apparent etymological connections with 'step', which might imply that the stepmother is one step removed, i.e. second best, or alternatively that she is *stepping into* someone else's shoes.[50] Similarly, the first three letters of the Latin *noverca* would have suggested a connection with *novus* ('new, novel'), even if Festus' (incorrect) derivation of the word from *novus* + *arceo* ('govern')[51] was not apparent. The word *novus* in Latin very often has a pejorative sense, as might be expected in

[48] Here, in addition to the metaphorical sense of *novercalis*, the idea is also present that the hands have been used to do the work of Hercules' stepmother, Juno: cf. Fitch (1987) ad loc.

[49] The prefix *stéop* (cf. German *stief*) is related to *ástieped* = 'bereaved' (cf. *stéopbearn* = 'orphan'; hence 'stepmother' in terms of etymology = 'one who becomes a mother to an orphan'): see *The Oxford English Dictionary* vol XVI s.v. *step-*.

[50] Since the other English terms for steprelations carry the same prefix, however, the specially negative resonance of 'stepmother' (as opposed to 'stepfather') is derived not solely from the etymological connections of the word itself but also from representations of the stepmother in folktales. By contrast, the connotations of the Latin *noverca* are much more disturbing, since the word is totally unrelated to the other terms denoting steprelations. See Maddox (1975) 34, Wald (1981) 46, Conolly (1983) 20–21, Hodder (1985) 41, 43: they point out that stepfamilies to-day are still the victims of the negative connotations of the terms; no satisfactory alternative has yet been agreed on, though many people in steprelationships go out of their way to avoid using terms such as 'stepmother'.

[51] Festus, p. 184 Th p. 174 M "noverca dicitur quam quis liberis sublatis novam uxorem ducit arcendae familiae gratia, id est coercendae" ("the term *noverca* is used to describe a woman whom a man with children takes as a new wife for the purpose of governing the family, that is keeping it under restraint"). Though obviously fanciful, Festus' comment offers further insight into the way the rôle of the stepmother was perceived.

a conservative nation to whom anything new is viewed as threatening. *Novus homo* ('a new man', i.e. a man who is the first in his family to hold high office in the state), from an aristocratic viewpoint, suggests an upstart. The Latin for revolution is *novae res* (literally 'new things'; cf. *res novare* 'to make things new' i.e. to overthrow the existing constitution, to engage in a rebellion). And Cicero's use of the term *poetae novi* ('new poets')[52] to refer to poets who departed from tradition was hardly meant to be flattering! Likewise, in the eyes of the family members, the *noverca* is an intruder who will introduce a new and unwelcome regime into the household.[53]

So far, I have not discussed the notion that a stepmother's feelings towards her stepchild may take the form of sexual passion rather than hatred. In Greek writings of the Classical period this circumstance is confined to myths such as that of Phaedra.[54] Among the Romans, the 'amorous stepmother' motif is found in the declamations, albeit rarely, though it may have been common in popular forms of drama such as the Mime, the Atellan farce and the Fabula Togata.[55] Two passages, which seem to allude to amorous stepmothers as a type, make an interesting connection with witchcraft. In *Georgics* 3, Virgil offers as the supreme example of the havoc wreaked by the sexual instinct the behaviour of mares, from whom is obtained the aphrodisiac *hippomanes* "quod saepe malae legere novercae/ miscueruntque herbas et non innoxia verba" ("which malevolent stepmothers often collect and they mix in herbs and not unharmful spells" 282f.). I have argued elsewhere[56] that the stepmothers referred to here are of the amorous rather than the murderous kind. The second passage is found in Juvenal's sixth satire: "hippomanes carmenque loquar coctumque venenum/ privignoque datum?" "why should I talk of *hippomanes* and spells and potions brewed and given to a stepson" (133f.). Though editors usually understand *venenum* in the sense 'poison', I would suggest, taking into account the erotic context, that

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[52] Cic., *Orat.* 161.

[53] The idea that the stepmother represents something alien, in contrast to the mother, was expressed by Scipio Africanus (apud Vell. Pat., 2.4.4: one's native land is a *mater* ('mother'), an adopted land *noverca*); compare Colum., 10.163, where *novercae* alludes to plants brought in from elsewhere and adopted by the Earth; also the Artemidorus passage referred to above note 11.

[54] There is an 'amorous stepmother' in the later Greek novel, Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, though her portrayal is heavily influenced by tragedies on the Phaedra theme.

[55] For this see later discussion in chapter 4.

[56] Watson (1993).

the reference is rather to a love potion (the root meaning of *venenum*).[57] Both poets, if my interpretation is correct, talk of amorous *novercae* as a familiar character type, a special class of stepmother.

Given the reputation of stepmothers for malicious behaviour, the very notion that a stepmother might be not only favourably disposed towards a stepson, but actually in love with him, might seem the most startling of paradoxes. This idea is made explicit in a Choral Ode on the power of Love in Seneca's *Phaedra* (353ff.), which ends:

> . . . nihil immune est,
> odiumque perit, cum iussit Amor,
> veteres cedunt ignibus irae.
> quid plura canam? vincit saevas
> cura novercas.

> . . . nothing is immune,
> and hatred dies when Love commands,
> old feelings of anger give way to the fires of passion.
> What more can I say? love overcomes cruel stepmothers.

The fact that a *noverca* could love her stepson is the supreme example of Love's universal power.[58] Such a remark, however, is not unexpected in a poet who takes advantage of every opportunity to score a rhetorical point. The phenomenon of the 'amorous stepmother' is not, in fact, as anomalous as Seneca would have us believe. The 'love' of this stepmother for her stepson is not of a selfless maternal kind—and therefore unnatural for a stepmother—but a sexual passion that is shameless, since it is she who takes the initiative, adulterous, since she is a married woman, and—in Roman eyes at least—incestuous. It results in the destruction of its object (e.g. the death of Hippolytus in the Phaedra myth) or at least (as in the Virgil passage, for instance) in the employment of a notoriously dangerous drug.[59]

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[57] See Watson (1993), 846–7. As well as the reference to amorous stepmothers in general, there may also be an allusion in one or both passages to a tradition, known only from Propertius, in which Phaedra employed a love charm against Hippolytus (Prop., 2.1.51f. "novercae pocula Phaedrae,/ pocula privigno non nocitura suo" "the cups of the stepmother Phaedra, cups which were not destined to harm her stepson"). See further discussion in excursus to Appendix 2.

[58] Cf. Sen., *Con.* 6.7, in which a man who gives his love-sick son to his wife is accused by his other son of *dementia* ('insanity'): a *color* on the father's side refers to the novelty of the situation: "audite rem novam: fratrem crudelem, novercam misericordem;" "listen to a novel thing: a cruel brother, a merciful stepmother"; cf. also Heliod., *Aeth.* 1.9.

[59] E.g. Caligula's madness was attributed to an overdose of *hippomanes* (Juv., 6.616f.;

The behaviour of the amorous stepmother must, then, be viewed as a special offshoot of stepmotherly malignity. Like the murderess, she is consistently viewed in an uncomplimentary light and (as will be shown in greater detail later) is subject to the same sort of prejudices: for instance, the amorous stepmother is always regarded as being at fault,[60] though there is every reason why a stepson might be represented as falling in love with his stepmother rather than the reverse.[61]

Conclusion

Making use of a wide variety of Greek and Roman texts, I have demonstrated that both cultures perceived stepmothers in an entirely negative light. It was commonly assumed that stepmotherly malevolence went hand in hand with the rôle of stepmother; a good stepmother was regarded as almost a contradiction in terms. Stepchildren, for their part, were invariably viewed as innocent victims. Stepmotherly hatred was thought to be so inevitable that the remarriage of a father was considered inadvisable because of the threat to his existing children. Wickedness on the part of a stepmother might be manifested as mild unpleasantness, or—at the other extreme—murder (the poisoning stepmother is a peculiarly Roman obsession), or else as sexual passion. It was often directed at a stepson who threatened the inheritance prospects of the stepmother's own child, though there is some recognition, especially in Greek texts, that a stepdaughter might be the victim of stepmotherly malice.

In subsequent chapters I shall explore the ways in which these attitudes were translated into a stereotypic presentation of the stepmother in Greek myths and in Roman literature. In addition, the

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cf. Suet., *Calig.* 50). The tradition (in Jerome's additions to Eusebius' *Chronicle* for the year 94) that Lucretius was driven to madness and subsequent suicide by an *amatorium poculum* ('love potion') also demonstrates the deadly potency of aphrodisiacs. Cf. Anne-Marie Tupet, *La Magie dans la Poésie latine* (Paris: 1976) 57, 79–81.

[60] Cf. the passage cited earlier from Diodorus Siculus (12.14) on the law of Charondas: in commenting thereon, Diodorus makes the point that the worst quarrels between fathers and sons are caused by stepmothers and that this is shown often on the Tragic stage: he must be thinking in particular of Phaedra and Hippolytus, since it is mainly in myths of the 'amorous stepmother' type that sons and fathers are set against each other by stepmotherly behaviour.

[61] See further chapter 3 below.

relationship between the literary figure of the stepmother and factual reality will be investigated. Though any stereotype is one-sided in its assumption that all members of a class will invariably behave in accordance with a standard pattern, it does not follow that it is pure invention: rather, it may be founded on characters existing in real life. On the other hand, the less the stereotype has a basis in fact, the greater the degree of prejudice involved in its creation. With this in mind, real-life evidence for stepmotherly behaviour and for stepfamily conflict in 5th century Athens and in Rome will be examined, in order to establish the extent to which the negative portrayal of the stepmother is grounded in prejudice and to what extent it is a reflection, albeit in distorted form, of prevailing social conditions.

CHAPTER TWO

STEPMOTHERS IN GREEK MYTH

In this chapter I will explore how Greek perceptions of the stepmother are brought to life through the medium of myth. First, the characterisation of the stepmother and the different types of plot involving stepmotherly malevolence will be examined. The consistency of treatment in both areas allows us to talk in terms of a stereotype, of which the individual mythical characters are particular manifestations. This leads to a discussion of the function of this stereotypic figure. Is she a stepmother proper, in other words, are the myths in which she appears concerned with the conflicts that may arise as a result of remarriage, or is her function symbolic, i.e. does the real meaning of these myths lie in addressing the problems of the relationship with the mother, the negative aspects of whom are encapsulated in the figure of the stepmother?

A. *The Nature of the Stepmother Myths*

1. *Types of story; popularity in the 5th century*

At least 21 Greek myths[1] are known in which stepchildren suffer mistreatment of some kind at the hands of a stepmother or a woman acting as such; many of these stories formed the plots of Tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides that have not survived.[2]

Stepmothers are not, in fact, prominent in myth before the fifth century.[3] The story of Phrixus' journey on the Golden Ram is early, though at what stage the stepmother element was introduced into the tale is unclear; certainly the plot of Ino, in later times the archetypal murderous stepmother, may have been a fifth century innovation.

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[1] For a summary of the stories, see Appendix 1.

[2] The following lost plays by Sophocles and Euripides dealt with stepmother themes: Sophocles' *Aegeus*, *Euryalus*, *Phaedra*, *Phineus*, *Phoenix*, *Phrixus*, *Tympanistae*, *Tyro*; Euripides' *Aegeus*, *Antiope*, the first *Hippolytus*, *Ino*, *Melanippe Desmotis*, *Phoenix*, *Phrixus* I and II, *Tennes*.

[3] For a full discussion (with bibliography) of the origins of the stepmother myths, see Appendix 2.

To the sixth century belong the myth of Phaedra and the story of the machinations against Theseus on the part of his stepmother, though this stepmother was possibly not identified as Medea until after the Persian wars. Several other important myths, however, make their first appearance in tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides: in Sophocles are encountered Sidero's mistreatment of her stepdaughter Tyro, Penelope's plot against Euryalus, a young stranger who claims to be Odysseus' bastard[4] son by Euippe, and the blinding of the Phineadae after being accused of attempted rape by their stepmother. Euripides, as far as we know, introduced the stories of Creusa's attempt to murder Ion, Themisto's murderous attack on the children of Ino, the attempted seduction of Tennes by his 'amorous' stepmother Philonome, the stepmotherly behaviour of Siris towards her foster-children, and of Dirce towards her husband's niece Antiope, and finally the mistreatment of Andromache and her son (concubine and offspring respectively of Neoptolemus) by Neoptolemus' wife Hermione. Both Sophocles and Euripides wrote plays on the subject of Phoenix: the version used (and possibly invented) by the Tragedians involved the blinding of Phoenix after a false accusation of rape by his father's concubine Phthia. (In Homer, Phoenix suffers exile after attempting to seduce the concubine at the bidding of his jealous mother).[5] Among stepmother myths not found in Tragedy, the story of Hippodamia and Chrysippus is also first found in the fifth century, in the historian Hellanicus of Lesbos,[6] while others belong to the Hellenistic period.[7] In short, the popularity of stepmothers as subjects of myth is a largely a phenomenon of the fifth century and later.

Myths involving stepmotherly malevolence fall into two main types according to the motivation for the stepmother's behaviour: first, those in which a stepmother mistreats, or plots against the life of, her stepchild or stepchildren through hatred inspired by jealousy; second,

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[4] In the myths, 'stepchildren' include not only the offspring of a former union on the part of the husband, whether regular or not, but also the illegitimate products of an adulterous relationship. Thus, the term μητρυιά is used in the *Ion* with reference to Creusa, who believes that Ion is her husband's bastard conceived during the course of their marriage.

[5] See further Appendix 1.

[6] *FGrH* 4 F 157.

[7] The story of Rhea is Alexandrian; Endeis is found first in the 2nd century AD, while the stepmother Astymedusa is known only from the Homeric Scholia, which may depend on Alexandrian sources. (For detailed references to these myths see under the relevant headings in Appendix 1).

and less common, what may be termed 'amorous stepmother' stories, i.e. myths in which the stepmother's plots against the stepson are prompted by a desire for revenge after amorous advances on the part of the stepmother have been rejected. Although the second type of story is akin to the 'Potiphar's wife' type,[8] of which the essential ingredients are the attempts of a married woman to seduce a younger man, her subsequent false accusation to her husband and the young man's punishment, amorous stepmother myths also share many features in common with myths involving stepmothers of the cruel/murderous type.

2. *Characterisation of the stepmother*

The portrayal of the stepmother in the myths, and—as far as we can tell—in most Tragedies based on these myths, is remarkably consistent. Several characteristics are repeatedly displayed by the stepmothers or stepmother-like figures: (i) they are evil and self-centred (ii) they lack self-control (iii) they are prone to jealousy (iv) they are cunning and treacherous.

(i) *The stepmother is evil and self-centred*

Stepmothers are nearly always painted as evil. Sometimes this characteristic is manifested simply in the cruel treatment of a stepchild, as with Sidero, second wife of Salmoneus, who tormented her stepdaughter Tyro after she had given birth to illegitimate twins and had been imprisoned for this by her father Salmoneus. In Sophocles' play on the theme, the violence of Sidero's attacks on her stepdaughter was brought home to audiences in strongly visual terms by the employment of a special mask worn by the actor playing Tyro which showed her πελιδνὴ τὰς παρειὰς 'black and blue on the cheeks'.[9] As well as bruising the girl's face, Sidero also cut her hair which, like her complexion, was famous.[10] More often, stepmothers direct

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[8] Examples of 'Potiphar's wife' myths include 1) the attempted seduction of Bellerophon by Proetus' wife, called Anteia by Homer (*Iliad* 6.160), but Stheneboea in other accounts, including a play by Euripides: see Papamichael (1983a) 2) the story of Peleus and the wife of Acastus; for discussion of Euripides' *Peleus*, including sources of the myth, see Papamichael (1983b).

[9] Pollux, 4.141. Sutton (1984) 154 concludes, on the basis of fr. 659 (see next note), that the mask also had shorn hair.

[10] The cutting of the hair is referred to by Sophocles, *TrGF* IV F 659; on the

their efforts towards destroying the unwanted offspring of their husband: in most myths this is the stepmother's whole *raison d'être*. Means employed vary, from the relatively uncomplicated, for instance Themisto's attack on her sleeping stepchildren (a story treated by Euripides in the *Ino*), to the elaborate plot devised by Ino in her attempt to dispose of Phrixus and Helle (see further below).

Even in myths on the subject of a stepmother's love for her stepson, she is portrayed as essentially wicked and selfish. In the usual[11] version of this type of myth, the woman in question is transformed into a malicious stepmother when her advances to her stepson are rejected by him, and she subsequently denounces him falsely to her husband, resulting in the mutilation or death of the unfortunate young man. She no longer cares what happens to her stepson, so long as he bears the blame.[12] This stepmother differs from the murderess only by virtue of the fact that her unbridled passion initially takes the form of sexual lust rather than jealous hatred.

The only exceptions to the general picture of stepmothers as malignant creatures intent on their stepchild's destruction are peripheral cases such as that of Theano in *Iliad* 5.69, who is said to have reared her husband's bastard (νόθος) Pedaeus in order to please her husband (cf. the statement by Andromache in Euripides' play of that name (line 224) that she often gave the breast to bastards of Hector out of devotion to her husband). There are no myths in which good behaviour on the part of a stepmother is an important element in the story. Furthermore, the wickedness of the stepmother arises directly from her rôle as stepmother and is not necessarily an intrinsic part of her own nature. Normally, these two things are indistinguishable; the point is clearly illustrated, however, in the case of Creusa in the *Ion*, where a change of behaviour is brought about by the false information that Ion is her husband's bastard by another woman. Euripides' treatment of the story affords a fine illustration of a

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reputation of her hair see Hes., fr. 30.25 Merk.-West; Pind., *Pyth.* 4.136. For her complexion/beauty, cf. Diod. Sic., 6.6.5., Prop., 2.28.51.

[11] An obvious exception is Euripides' sympathetic portrait of Phaedra in the second *Hippolytus*, but this is atypical.

[12] In making a false accusation against her stepson, the stepmother is motivated by a desire for revenge on one who has rejected her, or by the practical necessity of securing her own safety—if she does not take the initiative and accuse her stepson, he might tell his father about her amorous advances. Either way, she is supremely self-centred and unfeeling towards the stepson with whom she is supposedly in love.

belief'[13] in the inevitability of stepmotherly hatred (and, incidentally, a corresponding belief in the inevitability of maternal love: see below). At first, Creusa's character is depicted as unobjectionable: at her initial meeting with Ion, she feels a natural bond with him, since she is in fact his mother. Once convinced that Ion is her stepson, however, she is transformed into a potential murderess.

A comparison between murderous stepmothers and mothers in myth who murder their own children illustrates further the idea that stepmotherly behaviour is inextricably linked to the rôle of stepmother. Although nowadays it is acknowledged that women may harbour feelings of hostility towards their own children and that this can lead in extreme cases to murder,[14] the Greek myths display a refusal to admit this. In stories involving a mother who murders her own children the act is considered so unnatural that an external reason must be provided for the mother's behaviour. So, for instance, Medea has the motivation of Jason's infidelity;[15] Procne kills and serves up her children to get revenge for her husband's outrage against her sister and herself. Althaea's son Meleager had killed her brother.[16] In a story related by Hyginus, Sisyphus learns from the oracle of Apollo that he can destroy his brother Salmoneus by begetting on Salmoneus' daughter Tyro sons who will act as his agents of vengeance. When Tyro hears of the oracle, she immediately kills the sons she has born her uncle in order to protect her father.[17] In other cases of infanticide, the mother is portrayed as insane: Agave, in Euripides' *Bacchae*,

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[13] On the part of the playwright, but no doubt shared by his audience.

[14] P.E. Easterling, "The infanticide in Euripides' Medea'", *Yale Classical Studies* 25 (1977), 186, points out that murder by parents of their own children is not so uncommon. She quotes statistics from the U.K. showing that between 1957 and 1968, 1/3 of all murders involved children and were predominantly committed by their parents.

[15] I refer to the Medea of Euripides, who was the first to make her deliberately murder her own children—in earlier versions she either killed them accidentally while trying to make them immortal or else they were murdered by Creon's kin. See Denys L. Page, *Euripides: Medea* (Oxford: 1938) xxiii., March (1990) 35f.

[16] Cf. Hom., *Iliad* 9. 529ff.: in later accounts there is more than one brother. In Euripides' *Meleager* she may also have been jealous of her daughter-in-law Atalanta (probably introduced into the myth by Euripides) for whose sake Meleager had killed his uncles in order to get the hide of the Calydonian boar at the end of the hunt: see Webster (1967) 235, and for a discussion of the myth, Jan Bremmer, "La plasticité du mythe: Méléagre dans la poésie homérique" in *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique* ed. C. Calame (Genève, 1988) 37–56.

[17] Hyg., *Fab*. 60. Another myth known from Hyginus (*Fab*. 206) tells how Harpalyce, having been raped by her father Clymenus, obtained revenge by serving up her son to his father/ grandfather.

kills Pentheus while overcome by Bacchic madness,[18] Ino jumps off the cliff with her son while being pursued by her husband Athamas who has been driven mad, in most versions, by Hera, in revenge for the nursing of the infant Dionysus.[19] In nearly all of these cases, then, the maternal instinct is perverted only after the mother has become the victim of wrong on the part of a male relative,[20] or else is in the grip of madness. Although filiacidal mothers are usually regarded as morally tainted, they are nevertheless provided with an external motive for their crime. Stepmotherly hatred, on the other hand, is always imagined as arising from factors like greed, jealousy and resentment—in other words the stepmother's motivation is internal rather than external.

(ii) *Stepmothers lack self-control*

Stepmothers are remarkably lacking in self-restraint: feelings of hostility or sexual passion towards their stepchild are invariably translated into action. In the case of Sidero, for example, her stepdaughter Tyro has been imprisoned by her father Salmoneus as punishment for conceiving a child out of wedlock: Sidero, as stepmother, need take no rôle in this punishment, and her mistreatment of Tyro is a gratuitous act of spite. Although Salmoneus appears to acquiesce in it, he takes no active part in the cruelty.[21] If a stepmother is physically attracted to her stepson, she brazenly makes an approach to him (the virtuous Phaedra of the second *Hippolytus* who makes an attempt to hide her feelings is atypical both of stepmothers in general and of the Phaedra myth in particular).[22] Lack of self-control is especially well illustrated in those stories where the unexpected arrival of an heir (e.g. Euryalus, Theseus, Ion) provokes a prompt re-

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[18] It is possible that Euripides was the first to make Agave one of the killers of Pentheus: see, for instance, Webster (1967) 269; Dodds (1960) introduction xxxiv, however, argues that this is unlikely to be an Euripidean innovation.

[19] Cf. also the stories about the daughters of Proetus, who in their madness killed their own children (Apollod., 2.2.2) and the daughters of Minyas-Leucippe, Arsinoe (or Arsippe) and Alcathoe (or Alcithoe), who, possessed by madness and a desire for human flesh, drew lots to see who would contribute her child to be torn to pieces: Plut., *Mor.* 299E., Ant. Lib., *Met.* 10., Ael., *VH* 3.42.

[20] In the case of Chione, who throws her illegitimate child Eumolpus into the sea to hide her shame, the wrong is done to her not by a relative but by the god Poseidon, who has raped her (Apollod., 3. 15.4 is the sole source for the story).

[21] Also, whereas Sidero is punished by Tyro's sons, Salmoneus is merely made to see that he has done his daughter an injustice (e.g. *AP* 3.9).

[22] For further discussion, see Appendix 1.

sponse on the part of the stepmother (Penelope, Medea, and Creusa[23] respectively) who plots his destruction without further ado. As a final example we might mention Sophocles' memorable description in the *Antigone* of the stepmother of the Phineadae wielding the shuttle in her blood-stained hands as she pierces out the eyes of her stepsons:

Σαλμυδησσός, ἵν' ἀγχίπολις Ἄρης
δισσοῖσι Φινεΐδαις
εἶδεν ἀρατὸν ἕλκος
τυφλωθὲν ἐξ ἀγρίας δάμαρτος
ἀλαὸν ἀλαστόροισιν ὀμμάτων κύκλοις
ἀραχθέντων ὑφ' αἱματηραῖς
χείρεσσι καὶ κερκίδων ἀκμαῖσιν

Salmydessus, where Ares who dwells near the city
beheld the accursed, blinding wound
to the two sons of Phineus
by the savage wife,
a wound bringing loss of sight to the vengeance-craving orbs of
their eyes
smitten by her bloody
hands and the point of her shuttle

(Soph., *Antig.* 970ff.).

The blinding of the Phineadae by their father after they had been falsely accused of attempted rape by their stepmother Idaea (or Eidothea) was a favourite Tragic subject;[24] Sophocles employs here a variant in which the stepmother is so lacking in self-restraint as to blind the sons in person.

(iii) *Jealousy as a characteristic of the stepmother*

Jealousy is an integral part of the stepmother's image.[25] It may be manifested in various ways. A stepmother may be envious of the beauty of her attractive young stepdaughter. To the modern reader familiar with such fairy tales as *Snow White and Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella* and so on, this type of stepmother story is perhaps the most familiar.

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[23] In the case of Creusa, since she had previously told Ion, with unconscious irony, that her own son, had he lived, would have been about Ion's age (line 354), she should have realised the improbability of the suggestion made to her by the servant that Ion was a bastard of her husband's conceived during the marriage. The eagerness with which she believes the false story fits in with her rôle as stepmother.

[24] Pearson (1917) 315: Sophocles probably treated the subject in the *Phineus* A and the *Tympanistae*. Cf. also Radt, *TrGF* IV 484f., 458f.

[25] An obvious exception here is the 'amorous' stepmother.

Not surprisingly,[26] only two examples are found in Greek mythology. The mistreatment of Tyro by her cruel stepmother Sidero can be attributed to jealousy on the stepmother's part, though in fact no source gives any motivation for Sidero's behaviour.[27] Given, however, that Sidero punished her stepdaughter by attempting to mar the physical features on which the girl's reputation for beauty rested, it is reasonable to view this myth as akin to folktales in which a stepmother is jealous of a young stepdaughter in her prime.[28] The story of Phronime, mother of Battus, a Cyrenean foundation myth related by Herodotus, begins with a stepmother who wants to be rid of her stepdaughter: again jealousy of a beautiful young girl may underlie the story, particularly as it contains several other folktale elements.[29]

Most stepmothers in myth are motivated by a different type of jealousy: that another woman's son will become their husband's heir.

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[26] Since this type of story is concerned primarily with conflict between two female characters, whereas myths, even those in which women are prominent, normally involve women's interraction with the male world. Myths involving a stepmother, then, are usually centred on the question of which (male) child will inherit her husband's throne.

[27] Diodorus Siculus (4.68) attributes it to the mere fact of her being a stepmother (ὡς ἂν μητρυιά). For a foster mother who attempts to get rid of her beautiful foster-daughter, viewing her as a rival for her husband's affections, cf. Euripides' *Alcmaeon at Corinth* (plot summarised by Apollod., 3.7.7).

[28] Cf. the tale of *Snow White* where the stepmother's constant demands of the mirror to tell her 'who is the fairest of them all' suggest a beautiful but ageing woman whose insecurity about her looks is exacerbated by the presence of a young and attractive stepdaughter. Although stepmothers in folktales are usually unnamed, in the myth of Tyro the stepmother's name has a folktale quality in that it is descriptive of her character (Sidero = the Iron Lady: cf. Sophocles, *TrGF* IV F 658, *LIMC* VI.1 727 s.v. Neleus). Similarly, Tyro bears a name that describes one of her principal assets—her creamy complexion: it is a close equivalent of 'Snow White' (cf. Sophocles, *TrGF* IV F 648—a reference to the popular etymology of the name from τυρός (cheese): see Sutton (1984) 153). The overt cruelty of the stepmother Sidero is a feature more often associated with folktale than myth: in the latter, the stepmother usually works her destructive purposes through an agent (see further below).

[29] The following may be mentioned: (i) the anonymity of the stepmother (ii) the device of the false accusation (iii) the sending away of the unwanted child with orders for her to be killed (cf. Snow White) (iv) the motif of the 'compassionate executioner' (Thompson (1957) K512), in which a servant or other person who is charged with killing the hero or heroine saves their life (v) the eventual marriage of the heroine to a prince or king. As it appears in Herodotus, the story is to be classed as myth rather than folktale because of its function as a foundation legend. Nonetheless, this myth is basically a folktale which has been transferred into a mythical setting: cf. Wolfgang Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen: 1921/1969) 139f.

Though not spelt out, this may be assumed to be the case with Ino, Themisto and Medea, all referred to above. In the version of the myth in which Atreus and Thyestes are encouraged by their mother Hippodamia to murder their half-brother Chrysippus, we are told that she was inspired by jealousy of her husband's preference for his illegitimate child, and fear that he would make the child his heir.[30] A comparable story, though it does not concern a real stepmother, is a version of the Melanippe myth found in Hyginus, in which Theano, wife of Metapontus, sets her sons against their twin foster-brothers, when Metapontus shows favour to the latter, so that her sons, by killing the rival pair, can become their father's heirs.[31] In the case of Creusa in the *Ion*, although she has, as she thinks, no children of her own on whose behalf to be jealous, she nevertheless cannot bear the thought that the offspring of another woman is to be heir while she herself is denied children.[32] A similar situation is depicted in the *Andromache*, where the stepmotherly treatment of Andromache and her son at the hands of the barren Hermione is occasioned by jealousy on the part of Hermione that the son of her husband's concubine will be heir. Finally, Hera is envious of the prestige that will be obtained by another woman's offspring: Heracles, for instance, was destined, had not Hera delayed his birth, to rule all mortal men; her divine 'stepchildren', Dionysus, Apollo[33] and Artemis, are among the most important deities, whereas, by contrast, her own offspring, Hebe, Ilithyia, Ares and Hephaestus, are either unimportant, unlovable, or an object of derision.

In addition to the type of jealousy centering on the inheritance question, sexual jealousy may also be present, but only in cases where

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[30] See Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 157; Chrysippus, though a νόθος ('bastard'), was born from a previous union and so was the eldest son; he was greatly loved by his father.

[31] Hyg., *Fab.* 186. The 'foster brothers' are the twin sons by Poseidon of Melanippe, whom Theano had produced as her own in fear of divorce for sterility: her own sons were born later. See further below and Appendix 1.

[32] There is an unusual political/patriotic dimension to this myth. (See n. 60 below). Since Creusa is the only child of the Athenian king Erechtheus, and married to Xuthus, a foreigner, it is important for the preservation of the royal line uncontaminated that it should pass to Creusa's son and not to the offspring of Xuthus by a slave i.e. to a non-Athenian (the myth is also relevant to the spirit of the Periclean citizenship laws, on which see chapter 3). Thus Creusa is especially distressed by the fact that Ion is reportedly a bastard of her husband.

[33] Cf. Callim., *Hymn* 4: 55ff. (Hera is jealous of Leto because her son Apollo will be dearer to Zeus than Ares).

a woman becomes a stepmother through infidelity on the part of her husband.[34] In two stories where an illegitimate son turns up unexpectedly, sexual jealousy is a factor in the stepmother's reaction. This, it may be assumed, is the case with Penelope (Euryalus is the product of an affair which took place after the killing of the suitors by Odysseus)[35] and in the *Ion* the wrong done to her by husband is one of several underlying factors behind Creusa's anger.[36] Sexual jealousy of a rival is an important element in Hera's persecution of 'stepchildren' such as Heracles and Dionysus.[37] The Libyan myth of Rhea is similar: when her husband, the Libyan king Ammon, has an illegitimate child by Amalthea, the boy is brought to a cave to be guarded by Aristaeus and his daughter Nysa (Athena is also given the task of protecting him) because the king is afraid of his wife's jealousy.[38]

(iv) *The cunning and treachery of the stepmother*

Sneakiness is another marked peculiarity of most stepmothers. The stepmother performs her dastardly acts through the agency of a third person, often employing trickery to achieve her ends. The most notorious case is the intricate and cunning plot undertaken by Athamas' wife Ino to rid herself of her stepchildren, which involves two acts of treachery: first she causes sterility of the crops by inducing the women to roast the wheat-seeds, secondly she bribes the messenger sent by Athamas to the Delphic oracle to bring back a false response demanding the sacrifice of the king's first-born son Phrixus

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[34] In other words, there are no cases where the stepmother is retrospectively jealous of a stepchild who is the product of a previous relationship, though modern sociologists recognise this type of sexual jealousy as one of the most potent elements in stepmotherly resentment (see further below, chapter 3).

[35] On the other hand, the fact that in Sophocles' play on the theme Penelope induced her son Telemachus to murder the 'stepson' suggests that her primary motivation was the threat to Telemachus' position as heir: why would the son turn up and claim that Odysseus was his father unless he hoped to gain some benefit in the form of a share in the inheritance?

[36] Line 864. Also, by attacking Ion, a servant of Apollo, she can take her revenge on Apollo for his rape and desertion.

[37] See Appendix 2 for a full discussion of Hera as stepmother. It is possible that Hera was not regarded as a stepmother before the time of Plato, in which case her sexual jealousy would have been thought of as wifely, rather than stepmotherly; on the other hand, when Juno began to be treated as the supreme paradigm of the *noverca* by the Romans, the element of sexual jealousy was stressed: apparently it did not seem out of keeping with her stepmotherly rôle.

[38] Sexual jealousy is also prominent in the dispute between Hermione and Andromache, though Hermione is not a stepmother in the sense that she is raising another woman' son in the absence of the mother.

(and, according to many accounts, his sister Helle) as a remedy for the famine. Stepmothers who attempt to rid themselves of stepchildren through the agency of a third person sometimes employ members of their own family: examples include Hippodamia, whose murder of her stepson Chrysippus via her sons Atreus and Thyestes has been mentioned earlier.[39] Penelope's homicidal intentions against Euryalus were effected through Telemachus in the version used by Sophocles; according to Parthenius,[40] however, she convinced Odysseus that the young man was plotting against him, thus treacherously inducing the father to murder his own son. Similarly, in most accounts of the story, Medea gives the poisoned cup to her husband to administer to Theseus (prior to this she tried to dispose of Theseus by persuading her husband to send him against the bull of Marathon).[41]

Another typical act of treachery is the 'false accusation' motif, most commonly found in the 'amorous stepmother' tales. The best-known is Phaedra's false accusation of rape to Theseus when her advances to Hippolytus have been rejected. The blinding of the Phineadae after they had been charged with attempted rape by their stepmother Idaea (or Eidothea) has already been discussed.[42] An 'amorous stepmother' story is connected with Tennes, eponymous hero of Tenedos, who together with his sister Hemithea, was cast into an ark by his father Cycnus, after having been falsely accused by his stepmother Philonome when he rejected her advances.[43] Finally, mention can be made of the version of the Phoenix story in which the concubine of Phoenix' father falsely accuses the young man after he has rejected her and the son is blinded by the father. Apart from the 'amorous stepmother' tales, of which it forms an integral part, the 'false accusation' motif is also employed in the story of Phronime, in which a charge of sexual misconduct is made by Phronime's (unnamed) step-

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[39] Cf. Pausanias' version of the killing of Phocus by his half-brothers Peleus and Telamon, which he attributes to a desire on their part to please their mother Endeis, Phocus' stepmother.

[40] *Amat.Narr.* 3.

[41] Cf. also the various schemes devised by Hera to prevent the births of her 'stepchildren' Apollo and Artemis, Dionysus, and Heracles (details in Appendix 1).

[42] Cf. also a variant of the Oedipus myth in which Astymedusa, married by Oedipus after he had divorced Iocasta, falsely accused her stepsons of rape (see Appendix 1).

[43] Cf. the story (Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 4.288) in which Phrixus' flight on the ram comes about as the result of a rejection by him of amorous advances on the part of his stepmother, followed by the inevitable false accusation.

mother in an attempt to rid herself of the girl.[44] Not only do such cases involve a lie on the part of the stepmother, but the result is that the punishment of the stepchild is undertaken by a third party-it is normally the father who punishes his own child because he believes his wife's story.

Exceptions to this general picture of stepmotherly treacherousness are few: Sidero is overtly cruel to her stepdaughter[45] and in Sophocles' *Antigone*, as we saw, Idaea is depicted as putting out the eyes of her stepsons in person, though in other versions it is their father Phineus who performs the deed as a punishment. Themisto too attacks her supposed stepchildren herself, albeit under cover of darkness. In this case, however, trickery plays an important rôle in the story, being employed by the stepchildrens' mother Ino in order to thwart the stepmother's designs: in carrying out her plot to kill the children of Ino, Themisto uses as her helper a captive servant who is none other than Ino herself in disguise. To prepare the way for the murder, this 'servant' is instructed to cover Themisto's children with white garments and Ino's with black; realising Themisto's intentions, Ino—herself a murderous stepmother in the more common version of the saga of Athamas' marriages—switches the colours, so that Themisto is tricked into murdering her own children.

3. *Thematic characteristics of stepmother myths*

Just as the stepmothers exhibit recurrent character traits, so too the plots of the myths share elements in common: (i) the stepmother's machinations are often, though not always, ineffectual—the stepchild is rescued and/or the stepmother punished (or forced to flee/commit suicide in order to avoid punishment) (ii) stories involving stepmotherly

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[44] This was a surefire means of removing an unwanted stepdaughter, since fathers in myth whose daughters are guilty of such offences typically punish them. There are at least three similar stories (without the stepmother): (1) Hipponous, finding his daughter Periboea to be with child, sends her across the sea bearing a secret message that she is to be killed (Hes., fr. 12 Merk.-W., Diod. Sic., 4.35) (2) The father of Auge, discovering her illegitimate child (Telephus) by Heracles, gave her to Nauplius to be killed (Apollod., 2.7.4, 3.9.) 3) Catreus handed over his daughter Aerope, who had been seduced by a servant, for execution (Schol. Soph., *Ajax* 1297, referring to Euripides' *Cretan Women*). In all three cases the daughter is saved and married either by the man to whom her father has entrusted her punishment (in the case of Periboea), or else given by that man to another husband.

[45] Cf. Dirce, quasi-stepmother of Antiope: details in Appendix 1.

behaviour are normally presented in terms of black and white, the stepmother being totally in the wrong and the stepchildren her completely innocent victims (iii) malevolent behaviour is attributed solely to the stepmother, rather than to other stepfamily members.

(i) *The stepmother is often unsuccessful*

A feature of most stepmother stories is that the scheme to destroy the stepchild or stepchildren is ineffectual; this is often linked to the theme of the last-minute rescue. Stepchildren who are saved in this way include Phrixus, whose mother Nephele sends a golden ram to transport him (and, in later versions, his sister Helle) across the sea, Theseus, whose identity is revealed just before he swallows the fatal draught and Ion who, when the wine offered to him is poured away because of an ill-omened remark, notices as he is refilling the glasses the death-throes of a dove that has drunk the spilt liquid. In the myth of Themisto, the deliverance of the stepchildren involves the deaths of the stepmother's own children; similarly, when the foster-mother Theano induces her sons to kill her foster-children, a fight ensues in which it is Theano's sons who die instead; she commits suicide.[46] Since the story of Phronime is a foundation legend designed to demonstrate the connection of Battus with Crete,[47] it is essential to the plot that Phronime should be rescued: she becomes the concubine of Polymestus; their son is Battus, the future founder of Cyrene.[48]

Most stories ending in the salvation of the stepchild also involve the downfall of the stepmother, who either commits suicide (Themisto, Theano/Siris) or, more commonly, undergoes punishment. Creusa, for instance, is sentenced to death for her attempt on Ion's life (though the plot necessitates that the punishment is not carried out); Sidero

[46] The motif of the stepsons achieving their own deliverance is repeated in the Libyan myth of Dionysus, who defeats his stepmother's plots by victory in the war which she has induced her new husband Cronos to make on Ammon and himself.

[47] See discussion in Appendix 2.

[48] Cf. Tennes, the founder of Tenedos, who flees after the false accusation of his stepmother. In Euripides' *Andromache*, the protagonist, Andromache, concubine of Neoptolemus and mother of his only son, is rescued, along with her child, from the plots of Neoptolemus' wife Hermione. In the myth of Tyro, concerned as it is with the stepmother's mistreatment of her stepdaughter over a long period, the motif of the rescue in the nick of time is obviously inappropriate. Nevertheless, here too the stepchild is rescued eventually when her sons grow up and return to avenge their mother (cf. the similar story of Antiope, who is also saved by her sons).

is killed by Tyro's sons and Dirce by Antiope's; Medea, ever able to evade the consequences of her misdemeanours, is nonetheless forced to flee. The myth of Ino as Leucothoe (originally separate from the Phrixus legend) in which Ino commits suicide[49] after Athamas has been driven mad by Hera in revenge for having nursed the infant Dionysus, was in later times reinterpreted as a punishment for her attempted murder of Phrixus. Finally, in a version of the Phineadae story possibly employed by Sophocles, the stepsons themselves, restored to sight, exact vengeance on the stepmother.[50] There are a number of myths in which the stepmother's designs succeed: notably, those where a stepmother persuades her own sons to kill their half-brother (Endeis, Hippodamia and Penelope), and most of the 'amorous stepmother' tales, where the false accusation is believed. In myths of the latter type, however, the punishment of the stepson is often reversed, involving a miraculous restoration from death (e.g. a non-Tragic version of the Hippolytus legend) or mutilation (the Phineadae are healed of their blindness by Asclepius; Phoenix is healed by Chiron).

(ii) *Presentation of the story in terms of black and white*

In the basic[51] form of the myths the characters are presented in terms of black and white: the stepmother is totally evil, the stepchild her totally innocent victim.[52] To a certain extent this is an unavoidable consequence of the fact that most myths centre on the question of the inheritance of a throne: since the stepson, being the first-born, is the natural heir, he has no reason to feel threatened by a stepmother, whereas from her viewpoint the stepson is an obstacle in the way of her own son's future prospects.[53] This explanation, however, by no means applies in every case. Take the amorous stepmother, for

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[49] By jumping into the sea; she is transformed into the sea goddess Leucothoe.

[50] For details see Appendix 1.

[51] As opposed to particular cases such as the second *Hippolytus* where Phaedra's character is ameliorated for a special purpose.

[52] An exception is the Eeriboea story: see discussion in Appendix 2. Even in cases where stepsons attempt to murder stepmothers (Ion and possibly Theseus in Sophocles' *Aegeus* (so Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) 56) it is to extract vengeance after the stepmother has attempted to poison them. Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) 17, 18, makes the point that in myths involving the murder or attempted murder of parent by child it is always the parent who initiates the hostility.

[53] Her own position after her husband's death is also at stake: if her son inherits, she will be mother of the king.

instance. It would have been perfectly possible to represent a stepson as attempting to seduce his stepmother, yet this happens only[54] in two minor tales, the first a story from Hellanicus in which Corythus, the son of Paris' earlier partner Oenone, falls in love with Helen and is killed by his father,[55] the second, alluded to by Virgil, concerning the rape of Casperia by her stepson Anchemolus.[56] The only case in which the stepson is depicted in a less than favourable light is Euripides' second *Hippolytus*, where the unusually sympathetic portrait of Phaedra is balanced by making Hippolytus, with his self-satisfied intolerance of Aphrodite, share part of the responsibility for the ensuing tragedy. Furthermore, it would at least have been possible to explore the reasons why a stepmother feels as she does, in other words, to attempt to understand her plight if not to condone her behaviour. But apart from the *Ion* (see below) and the second *Hippolytus*, this does not happen in our extant accounts. The sole motivation given to the stepmother is jealousy or merely unmotivated stepmotherly malice, as with Eidothea/Idaea. Hera is another case in point. As the long-suffering wife of a philandering husband, whose only sons are the disabled Hephaestus and the uncontrollable Ares, most hated of all Zeus' children, she might well be considered to have some justification for resenting offspring of her husband like Heracles, greatest of all heroes. Yet from the *Iliad* on, although these factors are not ignored, they are not regarded as providing any excuse for Hera's behaviour: in the *Iliad* she is violently punished for attacking Heracles, while she is expected to accept Zeus' amours with equanimity, even to the point of listening to a catalogue of them in bed.

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[54] Apart from the *Iliad* version of the Phoenix story, but Phoenix seduces his father's concubine only at the request of his mother who is jealous. Cf. the version of the story of the Phineadae (*AP* 3.4., Diod. Sic., 4.43.44) in which they attack their stepmother at the behest of their mother.

[55] *FGrH* 4 F 29. Helen is said, however, to have received the young man φιλοφρόνως ('in a friendly manner') because he was exceptionally good-looking. According to Conon (*FGrH* 26 F 1. XXIII.I) the jealous Oenone sent Corythus to Helen to cause trouble and Paris killed his son after discovering him sitting in Helen's bedroom.

[56] *Aen.* 10. 389 "Anchemolum thalamos ausum incestare novercae" ("Anchemolus who dared to defile the bed of his stepmother") with Servius ad loc., citing as his authority Alexander Polyhistor, a Greek historian writing in Rome about the middle of the 1st century BC. The obscurity of the myth is suggested by Juvenal (7.234f.), who cites among examples of the pedantic questions of the *grammatici* 'nomen patriamque novercae /Anchemoli' ('the name and native country of Anchemolus' stepmother').

The only[57] stepmother to be portrayed in a manner that is not entirely unsympathetic is Creusa in Euripides' *Ion*, though as I shall demonstrate, her case is not as exceptional as it might seem at first sight. When the Chorus betray the news to Creusa that her husband Xuthus has been given a son, Ion, whom she believes, on the encouragement of her old servant (lines 817ff.), to be a νόθος got by her husband after she herself failed to produce an heir, Creusa is allowed to give voice to her feelings in the matter.[58] From her viewpoint, she has a legitimate grievance against the god Apollo: she is unaware that Ion is in reality her own child by Apollo whom the god has saved, nor does she know that Apollo's giving of Ion to Xuthus is meant to be for her own good.[59] The Chorus' revelation that Xuthus has been provided by Apollo with an heir looks like one further act of cruelty on the part of the god, who has already raped and then abandoned her and, as she believes, let her child die: now he is on the one hand denying her children, while at the same time presenting her husband with a son whom she must accept in the palace as his heir. Notice too that the sympathies of both the chorus and the old servant—and even, at this stage, of Ion himself (cf. especially lines 607–20)—lie with Creusa rather than with Xuthus. There is, however, a marked change at the point when Creusa's servant suggests to her that she should kill Ion (987ff.). Suddenly, Creusa is transformed from tragic heroine to would-be murderess. Various attempts have been made to explain this apparent inconsistency[60] in

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[57] Another possible case is the *Andromache*, where scholarly opinion is divided on the extent to which Hermione's portrayal should be regarded as purely negative: for further discussion, see Appendix 1 n. 7.

[58] Especially in her monologue (lines 859–922; cf. Imhof (1966) 36–8) and the subsequent dialogue between Creusa and her servant (925–69).

[59] Apollo's plan was that Creusa should discover Ion's true identity after he was brought home by Xuthus, but would keep this happy knowledge to herself, thereby enabling her son to gain his rightful inheritance while her own reputation remained unstained.

[60] The notion that Creusa's character undergoes a transformation is by no means universal. Some, for instance, have seen Creusa as maintaining our sympathy throughout the play because.her guilt is ameliorated to the extent that her motives are patriotic—she must save the house of Erechtheus from a foreign, bastard heir (Cf. Grégoire 171., Burnett (1971) 114, Nicole Loraux, "Kreousa the Autochthon: A Study of Euripides' *Ion*" in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, ed. J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin (Princeton: 1990) 168–206, esp. 173.). G. Gellie, "Apollo in the *Ion*", *Ramus* 13 (1984), 98, following Kitto (1961) 319ff., explains the difficulty in terms of the play's nature: since it is essentially a Comedy, with a 'happy ending', the audience can perceive that there is a change in Creusa's behaviour but not in her basic character, in other words, she won't really murder Ion.

characterisation. Winnington-Ingram, for instance, comments "when intrigue comes in by the door, psychology flies out the window"; along similar lines, Conacher suggested that Euripides "at this point has chosen melodrama".[61] We may, however, approach the problem in another way, bearing in mind that Euripides is here exploiting the stereotype of the malevolent stepmother. Since Creusa, once she has decided on murder, has assumed the rôle of stepmother, the change in her behaviour, albeit sudden, would seem—especially to an audience familiar with the stereotype—perfectly logical and even inevitable.[62] The attitude of Ion is also significant in this connection. On being persuaded by Xuthus that he is his bastard son, Ion at first hesitates to go and live in Athens in Xuthus' house, one of the main reasons for his reluctance being the inevitable hatred of Creusa. Interestingly, Ion is made to evince much sympathetic understanding of Creusa's plight, and even calls her hatred natural in the circumstances (πῶς δ'οὐκ ὑπ' αὐτῆς εἰκότως μισήσομαι "how will I not be hated by her and with good reason?" 611). After the attempt to poison him his demeanour when he reappears on stage has undergone a dramatic transformation—he expresses in the most graphic of terms his detestation of Creusa, whom he compares to various wild animals (1261ff.); all compassion for her has entirely evaporated. It might be argued that Ion could afford to be understanding of Creusa when his own safety, as he thought, was not at stake,[63] and it is only after she attacks him that he turns against her. But Ion's attitude towards Creusa has changed just as suddenly as Creusa's attitude towards him, the reason being, of course, that whereas in his earlier speech he was thinking of her merely as a childless wife betrayed by her husband, by the time of his next entrance onto the stage she has been transformed into a stepmother[64] and he in turn

[61] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Euripides: Poiêtês Sophos", *Arethusa* 2 (1969), 142, Conacher (1959), 36f., (1967) 282.

[62] That Creusa is now Ion's stepmother is made explicit by the reminder about the general reputation of stepmothers at line 1025 discussed earlier (ch. 1 n. 39).

[63] Creusa's hatred, mentioned at 611, is envisaged by Ion at that stage as potentially leading to the murder not of himself but of Xuthus, since he alludes to the record of jealous wives who have killed their husbands in lines 616–7.

[64] Note that one of the first comments Ion makes includes a reference to her as μητρυιά (1270); he also refers to her τέχνη ('guile') (1279) and later (1329f.) he comments that he legitimately hates his stepmother, in answer, it will be noted, to a plea for mercy for Creusa on the part of the priestess on the grounds that wives always dislike their stepsons.

into the injured stepson. In sum, although Creusa in the first part of this play is portrayed sympathetically in her rôle as wife and mother, in the rôle of stepmother, however, she is depicted no differently from other stereotypical μητρυιαί, ruthlessly taking prompt and decisive action in order to rid herself of the stepson who stands in line for her husband's throne.

It must be admitted that, in suggesting that stepmothers rarely receive a sympathetic treatment, I am relying to a large extent on the accounts of mythographers and their summaries of tragic plots, as well as other fragmentary remains of the plays: if Sophocles' *Tyro* or Euripides' *Aegeus* or *Phoenix*, for instance, were preserved in full, our ideas might need to be modified. Jennifer March has recently argued that Euripides adopted a sympathetic attitude towards his 'wicked women', even in lost works such as *Stheneboea* and the first *Hippolytus*.[65] March may have a point in the case of the latter play: she suggests that the ire of the audience was aroused not by the mere fact of Phaedra's wickedness (e.g. in making an approach to Hippolytus in person) but because an overtly shameless woman was presented by the poet as a tragic heroine in a manner designed to evoke pity.[66] In the case of Stheneboea, the fact that she has the title rôle in Euripides' play suggests that she was the protagonist and as such may, like Medea in the play named after her, have received some sympathy. By contrast, however, a stepmother never has the title rôle: she is simply the villainess of the piece. For instance, to take a Sophoclean example, in the *Tyro*, the stepdaughter is the heroine and tragic protagonist and Sidero her enemy. In plays where the stepmother appears in her classic guise, such as *Tyro*, *Phoenix*, *Aegeus*, *Phineus*, *Ino*, *Phrixus*, *Antiope* and *Melanippe*, it is always the suffering stepchild who is the principal character of the drama.[67]

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[65] March (1990). And Papamichael (1983a), 57, 63, though regarding Stheneboea in Euripides' play as essentially a 'wicked woman,' thinks that the Chorus at least would have sympathized with her (cf. p. 54 and n. 3).

[66] March (1990) 63 and 73 n. 98, 99.

[67] It is still possible, of course, that a stepmother such as Sidero or Ino was presented not merely as a stock villain and that an attempt at characterisation was made which might have included an exploration of the motives that led these women to plan the death of their stepsons. We simply do not possess the evidence to decide the matter one way or the other. On the other hand, even if a tragedian displayed a degree of sympathy towards a stepmother, he is still showing us women whose actions conform to a stereotype, i.e. stepmothers who destroy, or attempt to destroy, their stepchildren. In other words, the Tragic plots reinforce the popular perception of the way stepmothers behave.

(iii) Absence of malevolence on the part of other members of the stepfamily
In a real-life stepfamily,[68] troubles may arise between the different generations: stepmothers and stepchildren, stepfathers and stepchildren, or between those of the same generation, that is step- or half-siblings. This fact is obscured in the myths, where conflict is almost always laid at the door of the stepmother. The extent to which blame is attributed to the stepmother may be set in relief by a comparison with the way in which other stepfamily members are portrayed in the myths.

We have seen that in cases involving hostility between stepchildren and stepmothers the children are always depicted as innocent. As for siblings, although disputes between brothers over an inheritance are a common mythical theme,[69] step- and half-siblings are shown as prey to jealousies and conflicts among themselves on only two occasions in the myths we have been discussing.[70] The first is the story of the killing by Peleus and Telamon of their younger half-brother Phocus, offspring of an extra-marital association on the part of their father with the sea nymph Psamathe: their motive is envy and resentment that their father favours this child because of his superior qualities. Only in the relatively late version of Pausanias is Phocus' stepmother Endeis depicted as the instigator of the murder. The second example is more interesting: here, Chrysippus, the half-brother of Atreus and Thyestes (among others), is murdered through jealousy. The person (or persons) responsible, however, varies: Thucydides (1.9) attributes the crime to one of the brothers, making no mention of a stepmother; in Hellanicus' version the stepmother and half-brothers act in collusion. By the time of the Roman Hyginus (*Fab.* 85), the initiative is made to lie solely with the stepmother. Perhaps Thucydides' account represents the original myth, the changing focus from brotherly towards stepmotherly jealousy reflecting the increasing popularity of the stepmother theme?[71] Finally, in the sphere

[68] See discussion in chapter 3.

[69] E.g. Polynices and Eteocles, Atreus and Thyestes, Sisyphus and Salmoneus, Danaus and Aegyptus, Agrius and Oeneus, Acrisius and Proetus, Cresphontes and Polyphontes, and the Roman Romulus and Remus.

[70] Cf. also the version of the Euryalus myth in which Penelope induces Telemachus to kill her stepson. The fact that Telemachus is chosen by his mother to perform the deed might suggest that this myth is really about inheritance disputes involving half-brothers—the attribution of the crime to Penelope underlines the point that in stepfamily conflicts it is the stepmother who receives the blame.

[71] This could apply even if Thucydides' version is later than that of Hellanicus

of sexual involvement, there are no stories of illicit relationships between half-siblings, though again there are myths concerning brother-sister incest.[72]

It remains to explore the way relations between stepfathers and stepchildren are portrayed. In several of the stepmother myths which we have discussed a stepfather also plays a part: the behaviour of these stepfathers offers a striking contrast to that of the stepmothers in the same stories. The rôle played by Amphitryon, stepfather of Heracles, for example, is notably different to that of his 'stepmother' Hera. In contrast to Hera, who blights the whole of Heracles' life in pursuit of her stepmotherly aims, Amphitryon rears the hero along with his own son and is regarded as his earthly father (in Euripides' *Heracles*, for instance, there is emphasis on Amphitryon's rôle as father figure).[73] Other stepfathers not only raise a stepson but make him their heir. For example, after the rape of Io by Zeus and the birth of her son Epaphus, she was eventually taken as wife by Telegonus, king of Egypt, who raised the boy and appointed him heir to the Egyptian throne. His 'stepmother' Hera, on the other hand, seeing that Epaphus had become a powerful ruler in Egypt, was prompted by her habitual jealousy to arrange for his disposal.

(the relative dating of the two is uncertain: though Hellanicus was older than Thucydides, he was long-lived and their literary careers overlapped). Cf. the story invented by Odysseus (*Od.* 14.202), in which he pretends to be a bastard who, though treated on an equal footing by his father, was given a lesser share of the inheritance by his half-brothers after the father's death: the absence of stepmotherly interference here accords with my suggestion that the stepmother theme is on the whole a later insertion into myth. There is a story, found only in Hyginus (*Fab.* 122), that Aletes, son of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, usurped the throne and was killed in revenge by his half-brother Orestes, but Aletes is said to have acted on the mistaken belief that Orestes was dead.

[72] Though probably not before the Hellenistic period, e.g. Byblis and Caunus, and the Aeolidae (Ov., *Met* 9.507). Incest between gods (e.g. Zeus and Hera) is not regarded as immoral. Since, in Athenian law at least, marriages between homopatric half-siblings were allowed, an incestuous stepfamily relationship, had one appeared in myth, would have to have been between a brother and sister who shared a common mother.

[73] Though this is appropriate in a play where Heracles' divine ancestry is not to the fore. There are, it is true, alternative versions in which Amphitryon takes action against his stepson: in Pherecydes' account (*FGrH* 3 F 69), it was Amphitryon and not Hera who sends the snakes against Heracles in his cradle; there is also a story that Amphitryon sent Heracles away to work on a cattle farm (Apollod., 2.4.9). On neither occasion, however, is Amphitryon depicted as motivated by hatred or jealousy: the snakes were sent in order to test which son was his own, while Heracles was sent away because he had committed one murder in a fit of rage and Amphitryon was afraid he would do so again.

The motif of a king taking pity on an unmarried mother by marrying her and raising her son (his stepson) as his own child also occurs frequently in myths where a stepmother is not involved. Examples include Asterius (or Asterion), who married Europa and brought up her three sons by Zeus (Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon) and Borus, who raised Menesthius, the son of his wife Polydora by the river god Sperchius.[74] Sometimes the father of the child is a hero rather than a god, e.g. Heracles' son from Auge, Telephus, was adopted by her husband Teuthras,[75] Deïoneus took on Perigune and her son by Theseus,[76] and Arion Hesione's son by Telamon.[77]

In most myths where a stepfather adopts a stepson, he has no son of his own, and it could be argued that the stepfather's raising of the wife's child is not altruistic but inspired by his need to have an heir. He is, however, under no obligation to select his stepson, rather than someone else, for this rôle (in Athens, at least, adoption tended to be within the family if possible);[78] the fact that he is prepared to adopt the son of his wife by another man (or god) underlines the complete absence on his part of jealousy and malevolence towards his stepchild.[79]

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[74] For Asterius, see Apollod., 3.1.2., Diod. Sic., 4.60.3., for Borus, Hom., *Iliad* 16.173–8., Heliod., *Aeth.* 2.34. In one version of the Perseus story (Hyg., *Fab.* 63), Danae and Perseus, her son by Zeus, after being cast out by Danae's father Acrisius, are taken on by king Polydectes who marries Danae and raises Perseus, protecting him from his grandfather (the usual version e.g. in Euripides' *Dictys*, has Perseus raised by the king's brother Dictys; Polydectes is his enemy, sending him off against the Gorgon to clear the way for an attempted seduction of Danae (cf. Apollod., 2.4.1–2., Strabo, 10.5.10., *AP* 3.11., Webster (1967) 61–4).

[75] In Euripides' *Auge* (cf. Strabo, 13.1.69; see Webster (1967) 238f.), Telephus and his mother were both rescued by Teuthras, in other accounts (e.g. Diod. Sic., 4.33.7–12., Apollod., 2.7.4, 3.9.1), Telephus was reared by a herdsman and adopted by Teuthras after he was later recognised as Auge's son.

[76] Plut., *Thes.* 8., cf. Paus., 10.25.7.

[77] Tzetz., *Lyc.* 467. Where the stepchild is the son of a god, the myth may have arisen in the first place because of the desire of a state or ambitious family to claim divine descent from a demi-god in the form of a city founder or early king (cf. Rose (1958) 50). Obviously, for a demi-god to perform the function of king or city-founder, he must have social status (which he would not have as the illegitimate son of a girl raped by a god); thus the girl must marry a king who accepts her child as his heir. But the point is that such stories could not have arisen if there was any feeling that stepfathers were unwilling to take on another's child as their own.

[78] See chapter 3 n. 47.

[79] To some extent the difference between the behaviour of stepmothers and stepfathers has to do with the difference in the position of men and women. In most cases the stepmother's own child will not inherit because the stepchild is the eldest son. The stepmother's lack of choice in the matter must inevitably lead to resent-

There is little evidence for an ancient equivalent of Dicken's Mr Murdstone.[80] Stepfathers who kill or persecute their stepchild do occasionally appear, but they play only a very minor rôle in myth in general and where they do occur they are motivated by different emotions from those pertaining in the case of stepmothers. One type of myth involves a stepfather who has killed the father, and married the mother, of the stepson in order to usurp a throne. Any murderous intentions against the stepchild are here motivated not by hatred of the stepchild but solely by the stepfather's need to protect his own dubious position. The most conspicuous example is the myth which formed the plot of Euripides' *Cresphontes*, where Polyphontes kills his elder brother Cresphontes, the husband of Merope, taking over both throne and queen. In an effort to save her son Merope sends him to be brought up by her father; attempts on the part of Polyphontes to track down and kill the child are unsuccessful. The action of Euripides' drama concerned the return of the younger Cresphontes, who won his way as a guest into the palace by pretending that he was the slayer of Polyphontes' stepson and had come to claim the reward that Polyphontes had offered for Cresphontes' life. The 'stranger' eventually killed the unsuspecting Polyphontes, thereby avenging his father's murder and regaining his rightful inheritance.[81]

It is clear that the stepfather of myth is an entirely different character from the stepmother. More often than not, he raises the stepson as his son, even in cases where he has children of his own.

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ment and fuel feelings of jealousy. A stepfather, by contrast, is free to chose his own heir. Sometimes, however, a stepfather raises another's son even though he has a son of his own and thus does not stand in need of an heir (e.g. Amphitryon).

[80] In *David Copperfield*.

[81] For the myth see Harder (1985) 7–12. Another example of a 'cruel stepfather' is the story that Agamemnon killed Clytemnestra's first husband, Tantalus, and her child, in order to marry her by force (referred to by Eur., *IA* 1148ff.; cf. Apollod., *Epit.* 2.16., Paus., 2.18.2., 2.22.2f.). More noteworthy is Euripides' portrayal of Aegisthus in the *Electra*, where Aegisthus' rôle in the sufferings of his stepchildren is afforded prominence, especially at the beginning of the play. Mention is made of a failed attempt on the part of Aegisthus to kill Orestes, who has escaped (17). In addition, Aegisthus is given great, and at times, sole, responsibility for the sufferings endured by Electra. For example, it is said that he tried to kill Electra, who was defended by her mother Clytemnestra (25–28). And in a more striking Euripidean addition to the myth, Electra is represented as having been married to a poor man by Aegisthus, to prevent her raising an heir of noble blood who might attempt to regain the throne that he usurped (34–8). Parallels have been drawn between Euripides' characterisation of Aegisthus and of Polyphontes, both representing the typical tyrant figure: see Webster (1967) 143–6, Harder (1985) 8, 50, 54.

Often the benevolence of his character is underlined by the fact that he generously marries an unmarried mother, a woman who would otherwise be a social outcast, as well as taking on her child. In the few cases where a stepfather is not portrayed as a kindly character, his treatment of his stepson is justified.[82] A murderous stepfather such as Cresphontes differs from the stepmother in that his treatment of the stepchild stems from the fact that he has murdered his wife's first husband in order to take over the throne. Finally, there is no male equivalent of Sidero, nor of Phaedra: no stories are told about lust on the part of a stepfather for a stepdaughter, though such a situation might well have been envisaged. [83]

To summarise, the portrait of the stepmother in Greek myth shows a considerable degree of consistency: stepmothers are invariably presented as evil, jealous and uninhibited. The stepmother's machinations are often, but not always, thwarted, while the basic story is presented in terms of black and white, with the stepmother as villainess and the stepchild as the persecuted innocent. Finally, disputes within stepfamilies are almost always attributed to the stepmother rather than to other family members (in particular, stepfathers). This stereotypic portrayal of the stepmother may be regarded as an embodiment of those negative attitudes towards the stepmother which are attested, as demonstrated in chapter 1, in Greek and Roman literary texts from all periods.

B. *The Function of the Stepmother in Myth*

Given that the stepmothers who appear in myth conform to a consistent pattern, it is not surprising that the figure of the stepmother has often been regarded as symbolic rather than real. This conclusion has been arrived at by those considering the myths from a variety of perspectives: structuralist, psychoanalytic, sociological/historical. As

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[82] E.g. the case of Amphitryon: see above. Minos, in shutting up the Minotaur in the labyrinth, is depicted as acting not from stepfatherly hatred but in accordance with the decree of the oracle which he had consulted because a monstrous birth was a bad portent.

[83] Especially since stepfather/stepdaughter 'incest' is in real life (at least on contemporary evidence) much more common than that between stepmothers and stepsons—see further in ch. 3.

a prominent character in the folktale,[84] the stepmother has also received considerable attention from folklorists, employing similar methods of approach. On a Proppian structuralist analysis,[85] for instance, according to which the sequence of events in every tale is seen to follow a typical pattern (the hero/heroine is cast out from home, undergoes persecution, and is eventually rescued in a happy ending), the stepmother performs the function of persecutor of the hero(ine). If this approach is applied to the folktale of Hansel and Gretel, in which the stepmother who cast out the children has died by the time the children return home after killing the witch, it is clear that the two characters—the stepmother and the witch—are identical and interchangeable in terms of the function they perform in the tale.[86] According to this view, since the stepmother is merely an opponent of the protagonist(s), the fact that she is a *stepmother* (as opposed to a witch or some other villain) is essentially unimportant. It would be possible to apply this type of analysis to several of the stepmother myths. The story of Ino, for instance, closely resembles a folktale in many of its details[87] and Ino might be regarded simply as the persecutor of the hero and heroine. The stepmother can also be regarded as a persecutor figure in the story of Sidero and Tyro: this is shown by the fact that in the story of Antiope and Dirce, the plot of which is parallel to the Sidero myth, the same rôle is played by the heroine's aunt by marriage. Similarly, in folktales and myths of the 'Potiphar's wife' type, the basic structure of the tale concerns the attempted seduction of a young man by a married woman and the punishing of the youth by the woman's husband: it makes little difference to

[84] For discussion, see Appendix 3.

[85] Propp (1968).

[86] Propp, for instance, regards dragons as stepmothers in another guise. Cf. Holbek (1987) 436.

[87] The story of Ino's plot against Phrixus and his subsequent flight follows the familiar folktale pattern of the persecuted hero who is forced to flee from home, receives help on his journey and eventually finds happiness. In addition to the function of Ino as adversary of the hero, several details of the story may be regarded as folktale motifs, for instance Ino's bribing of the messenger to falsify the oracle's response, an incident cited by Thompson (1957) K981, who compares the common 'Uriah letter' motif, in which a letter carried by a messenger with orders to execute the bearer is falsified to produce the opposite outcome. The rescue at the nick of time is another folktale motif, as is the carrying of Phrixus on the Golden Ram (B540 animal rescuers; cf. B542.2 escape on flying horse). Note too that the ram is sent by Phrixus' mother Nephele: it is common in folktales for the dead mother to return in some other form to aid her persecuted children (E323.2).

this pattern whether the woman is a stepmother, an aunt by marriage,[88] a sister-in-law[89] or the master's/host's wife.[90]

The psychoanalytic approach has been widely applied to both myths and folktales dealing with stepmothers. Analysed from a Freudian perspective,[91] such stories are symbolic expressions of conflicts within the psyche, especially during the process of maturation. Two important principles are operative: (1) projection, whereby the feelings of a child are presented as phenomena occurring in the surrounding world, and are projected onto an adult character, in this case, the stepmother and (2) the split, whereby conflicting feelings about the mother are distributed among different characters in the tale.[92] To take a much discussed example from folktale, the story of Hansel and Gretel, on a Freudian analysis, is concerned with a child's feelings of insecurity and fears that the parents, especially the mother, will not continue to nurture it. These feelings are projected onto the stepmother who is shown as casting the child out, i.e. literally fulfilling these fears and insecurities.[93] Moreover, the child has ambivalent feelings towards its mother: as nurturer, she is loving and loved, but she may also, he fears, cast him out. This is represented symbolically by splitting the mother into two (or rather three) characters: the dead mother, remembered with affection, and the stepmother onto whom all negative feelings about the mother can be projected without feel-

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[88] Cf. the story of Phrixus and Demodice mentioned at [Hyg.] *Astr.* 2.20.

[89] Cf. the early Egyptian folktale "The Story of Two Brothers", discussed in Appendix 3.

[90] The original Potiphar's wife (*Genesis* 39) was the wife of Joseph's Egyptian master; Bellerophon was approached by the wife of his host Proetus and Peleus by the wife of his host Acastus.

[91] Freud has most widely influenced discussion along psychological lines, though the Jungian concept of archetypes has also been applied, especially to the folktale. In the view of Jung and his followers, folktales embody universal psychological experience. This collective unconscious involves the creation of archetypes, of which the most significant, the Great Mother, is split into positive and negative aspects. The stepmother of the folktale, then, is a symbol of the negative side of the Great Mother archetype. Cf. Hedwig von Beit, *Symbolik des Märchens* (Bern/Munich: 1952; 6th ed., 1981) 133f., 670, 769 etc., Marie-Louise von Franz, *Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales*, (Dallas: 1972) 85, 120, 154, 190f., Holbek (1987), 297ff., referring to W. Laiblin, "Das Urbild der Mutter", *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie und ihre Grenzgebiete* 9 (1936), 76f., 80–96, 129–51.

[92] The first to talk of the split was Otto Rank, *Psychoanalytische Beiträge zur Mythenforschung* (Leipzig/Wien: 1919) 16 (in connection with the father rather than the mother). See also Bettelheim (1976), Holbek (1987), 269.

[93] Note that in a pre-Grimm version of the Hansel and Gretel tale, it is the *real* mother who casts out the children: cf. Holbek (1987) 393.

ings of guilt, because she is by definition evil. The wicked witch is also the stepmother/negative mother figure in a new guise. The Ino and Phrixus myth was discussed by Caldwell[94] along similar lines, Nephele's arrival in the nick of time to save the children at the altar being likened to the appearance of the fairy godmother in folktale which resolves childhood anxieties about the mother.[95]

Another type of emotion projected onto the stepmother has to do with the Oedipus complex, and has been discussed in connection with both folktales and myths of the 'Potiphar's wife' type. The 'Potiphar's wife' character, on this view, is seen as a mother figure onto whom are projected a young man's Oedipal desires.[96] The psychology underlying stories of this type is as follows: in the Oedipus complex, the son fantasises about satisfying what he perceives to be his mother's desires: because of her greater experience, however, he is filled with anxiety that he may be unequal to the task; he also fears punishment at the hands of his father ('castration anxiety'). These conflicting emotions find expression in various elements of the myth. The incestuous desires of the son are projected onto the mother figure: that the desires are really those of the son rather than the mother is shown by the fact that the father believes the false accusation as well as by the fact that the son is punished. The carrying out of the punishment by the *father* is a projection of the son's castration

[94] Caldwell (1990) 352: "the appearance of the fairy godmother at the last moment answers every child's anxious question, 'When will my mother return?'

[95] For the psychoanalytic approach applied to the Creusa/Ion myth, see Rabinowitz (1993) 210ff. On the stepmother as a symbol for fears about the mother, see also Delcourt (1959) 62–4, Sourvinou-Inwood, (1990) 410. The latter regards Themisto as a stepmother in intention, but her killing of her own sons by mistake also reflects fears about the mother in a toned-down form, in other words she symbolises the bad mother as well. I would suggest that Themisto, rather than being a symbol for the negative side of the mother, is a stepmother who is ironically turned into a bad mother not through her own fault but through the counter- machinations of another stepmother, Ino (who is a stepmother proper in the myth of Phrixus, but also in this myth stands in that relationship to Themisto's children).

[96] In a similar way, the 'Catskin' folktale (a common variant of the Cinderella type), where the girl works as a household drudge because her widowed father wishes to marry her, is interpreted as an inverse projection of incestuous feelings on the part of a daughter (Electra complex) onto her father, so that instead of the girl being shown as in love with the father, the reverse is depicted. (The Electral problem is resolved at the end when she marries the prince). That it is really the daughter who loves the father is shown by the fact that the girl gets punished (in the Catskin story type, by having to flee and work as a drudge; in another common tale of this type (Aarne/Thompson Type 706: 'The Maiden without Hands') by having her hands cut off).

anxiety; this is also reflected in the son's rejection of the advances of the mother figure. Finally, the son's fears about his own inadequacy in relation to the mother are manifested in the shape of the threatening mother figure who is responsible, by her malicious accusation, for the punishment of the innocent son.[97]

According to the methods of analysis discussed so far, the myth or folktale is treated as pure fiction, bearing a relationship to psychological, but not necessarily to social or historical, reality. Because similar tales occur around the world, the particular social conditions that produce the story, and/or the character of the narrator, have often been considered irrelevant. A different approach (starting with Lévi-Strauss' criticism of Propp along these lines) has been to regard myths and folktales as mirrors of real social conditions. A connection has been made, for example, with initiation rituals. A folktale such as 'Snow White' is thus interpreted as reflecting the passage of a young girl from childhood to puberty, the initiation into womanhood involving separation from home and ritual isolation.[98] Similarly, in tales featuring a hero, the young man's transition from boyhood to manhood also involves separation from the mother; accordingly in folktales he is shown defeating and breaking away from the mother figure, represented by a stepmother, monster or other form of persecutor. (This approach can also cope with the widespread geographical distribution of many folktales, since similar initiation rites might be presumed to have been performed in a variety of cultures).[99] The myth of Theseus and Medea has also been interpreted along these lines, Theseus representing the typical ephebe.[100] Alternatively, the

[97] For a discussion along these lines of the Egyptian folktale *The Story of Two Brothers* (cf. Appendix 3), see Slater (1968) 276–82. For the Phaedra myth analysed in this way, see Caldwell (1990) 364ff.; also Rankin (1974), 71–94 and (briefly) Delcourt (1959) 64. Caldwell thinks that in myths such as Bellerophon where the son is not punished (Bellerophon overcomes his enemies and marries Stheneboea's sister) the castration anxiety is uppermost: the son's success represents his replacement of the father. Where the punishment is successful—and this applies to many of the amorous stepmother stories—and the emphasis is on the wicked mother figure, then the uppermost feeling is the anxiety about satisfying the mother.

[98] Cf. N.J. Girardot, "Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", *American Journal of Folklore* 90 (1977), 274–300.

[99] For a discussion of this type of approach to both myth and folktale see H.S. Versnel, "Myth and Ritual" in *Approaches to Greek Myth* ed. L. Edmunds (Baltimore: 1990) 44ff.

[100] See Sourvinou-Inwood (1988), 176: she places special emphasis on the iconography of the attempted stepmatricide (vases showing Theseus attacking a woman,

folktale or myth may be seen as a simple reflection of social conditions known to have existed at a given historical period and in a specific area. Thus, for instance, the stepmother may represent in fictional form a threat to the child in real life, or real-life events too horrible to acknowledge. For the folktale, it has been suggested that the story of Hansel and Gretel might mirror the fact that at times of famine, members of the peasant classes in Europe were sometimes forced to get rid of unwanted children. The guilty truth could be ameliorated by attributing the act of abandonment to a stepmother rather than a mother.[101]

In most of the interpretations discussed above, the stepmother appears not as a stepmother proper but as the mother in a disguised form, a fictional way of safely dealing with negative thoughts or fears about the real mother by projecting them onto a universally hated figure, the stepmother. In many folktales and in some myths, especially those where the stepmother is a folktale-like character (e.g. Sidero and Tyro, mentioned earlier in this connection), the stepmother may indeed be no more than symbolic: in other words, the true meaning of the tale is not concerned with disputes caused by a second marriage and the introduction of a stepmother.[102] In some cases, however, this approach will not work: it is least persuasive in myths where the stepmother is motivated by a desire to obtain the inheritance for her own son. Such myths are essentially concerned with the conflicts over inheritance caused by a man producing sons from different women, and the stepmother's identity as such, rather than as a symbol, is a necessary ingredient in the story. The stepmother may also be 'real' in other less obvious cases. An example is the Phineus myth, as interpreted (correctly, in my opinion) by Bouvier and Moreau.[103] They see the myth as reflecting the disruption caused to the family

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whom she takes, rightly, to be Medea): the stepmother stands for the mother, who must be symbolically killed before the ephebe can attain manhood.

[101] A different approach to the folktale sees the stepmother as a concept which arose from 'a break of endogamy and the acquisition of wives from outside the clan from which the exchange of marriage partners took place'. It is for this reason that stepmothers are often portrayed as witches, since they represent something foreign: see Segalen (1981) 75.

[102] Sourvinou-Inwood (1990) esp. 410ff. makes much of the stepmother as symbolic of the bad mother, but she also acknowledges that the stepmother may be a real stepmother too: she regards myths as polysemic, which means that the stepmother can function as several things at once. Such an approach works well for Medea, though I would dispute it in the case of Themisto (discussed earlier n. 95.)

[103] Bouvier and Moreau (1983), 5–19.

when the nuclear family structure is destroyed by the introduction of a second wife. This view has the advantage of being able to incorporate the various versions of the story: in some, the mother is divorced and still alive; she incites her sons to make a sexual assault on the stepmother; in others the sons are the innocent victim of a false accusation on the part of the stepmother; in another, the mother herself blinds her own sons to get vengeance on her husband for divorcing her. The constant theme in all these accounts is the disastrous results for the family of a father's remarriage and the consequent intrusion of a stepmother: these may take the form of stepmotherly malevolence (the false accusation, and the fact that the father believes it, may reflect fears held by fathers in real life who take a second wife younger than themselves[104]) or a subversion of normal relationships, so that the mother whose place has been taken by the second wife may become herself a wicked stepmother to her sons,[105] while in the other versions the father comes into conflict with his own children.[106]

In many myths, then, the stepmother functions unquestionably as a real stepmother. It is important to remember also that even if she is interpreted as symbolic in some cases, the fact that it is a stepmother who is chosen to play a symbolic rôle says something about the social conditions under which the tales were developed, in other words, it attests to the stepmother as a recognisable social phenomenon.[107] This relationship between myth and reality leads to one

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[104] On the relationship of this aspect of the myth to real life, see further discussion in ch. 3.

[105] I prefer this interpretation to that of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Le mythe dans la tragédie, la tragédie à travers le mythe" in *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique*, ed. C. Calame (Genève, 1988) 176, who finds the stepmother in this story a symbol for the bad mother. The idea that the stepmother reflects actual stepfamily conflict is also useful in myths where a stepdaughter's presence is difficult to explain by other means, e.g. in the story of Tennes, if the amorous stepmother is solely a symbol for the young man's Oedipal desires, why is his sister Hemithea cast out with him?

[106] For the folktale, too, some have viewed the stepmother in terms of social realities, e.g. Hertzberg Johnsen, *Myten om den onde stedmor* (Oslo: 1982) referred to by Holbek (1987) n. 381, who describes Johnsen's book as a historical study of stepmothers in Norwegian folktales and in real life in pre-industrial Norway. Segalen (1981) 75 views folktales such as Cinderella as a reflection of the attitudes of society against the remarriage of widows who have children from a previous marriage.

[107] Cf. Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (Oxford: 1974) 16, who explain the prevalence of stepmothers in fairy tales as a reflection of social conditions where there was a strong chance of a partner dying and the survivor remarrying.

final question, namely the reason for the special popularity of the stepmother myths in the 5th century. As noted earlier in this chapter, many stepmother myths are not attested before this period, and the theme was especially prominent in Attic Tragedy. Is this to be explained in terms of the social conditions prevailing in 5th century Athens? Do the myths reflect issues that were of particular interest at the time the Tragedies were composed?[108] Was there an increase in the number of stepfamilies at this period? Was the stepmother who desired to rob her stepson of his inheritance, or the stepmother whose presence represented a sexual threat, a phenomenon to be encountered in real life? The answers to these questions will be sought at length in the chapter that follows.

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[108] For a brief discussion of stepmother myths in their 5th century milieu, see Seaford (1990) 168ff., who also notes the absence of stepmothers in the Homeric epics. He points out (159) that Tragedy concentrates more on family conflict than did Homer because of the changed nature of marriage in the city state: in Athens, questions of dowry and of the legitimacy required to produce offspring for the *oikos* assumed greater importance.

CHAPTER THREE

STEPMOTHERS IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

A. *Evidence for Stepmotherly Activities in Real Life*

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that the prominence of the stepmother element in 5th century Greek literature might reflect contemporary social conditions. I would like to consider now the evidence for stepmothers and stepfamily conflict in 5th century Athens, in order to determine more precisely the nature of the relationship between the myths and real life.

The essential prerequisite for stepmotherly behaviour is the remarriage of a man with offspring from a previous union. It is likely that in fifth century Athens this circumstance was commonplace. Thompson[1] demonstrated the existence of substantial evidence for second marriages of both sexes among the upper classes at Athens in the 4th and 5th centuries; in the majority of cases the first marriage had produced children. Moreover, of 23 men known to have remarried after the death or divorce of their wife, 19 had children from both marriages. Stepmothers, then, must have been an everyday phenomenon in Athens—more so, in fact, than in the society depicted in the myths, given the frequency of divorce and subsequent remarriage on the part of both sexes (in myths involving stepmothers, by contrast, this is not a significant factor: the first wife normally dies). Moreover, since the custody of the children after a divorce seems to have been with the father,[2] a new wife would have played an active rôle in bringing up her stepchildren, and consequently would have had the opportunity at first hand to behave in a stepmotherly fashion.

Granted the existence in Athens of social conditions which could provide a breeding ground for stepmotherly machinations, I shall begin by searching for evidence of real-life parallels to the types of stepmother who appear frequently in the myths. For this purpose, it

[1] Thompson (1972), 211–25; cf. also S. Isager, "The Marriage Pattern in Classical Athens: Men and Women in Isaios", *C&M* 33 (1981/2), 81–96, esp. 87, 90 and (briefly) M.-Th. Charlier and G. Raepsaet, "Etude d'un comportement social: les relations entre parents et enfants dans la société athénienne à l'époque classique", *AC* 49 (1971), 597 n. 39.

[2] Harrison (1968) 44f., Garland (1990) 90.

will be convenient to divide stepmotherly behaviour into three main categories: 1) the mistreatment of a stepdaughter 2) the hatching of plots designed to remove the son or sons of another union who stand in the way of the stepmother's own son inheriting 3) the 'amorous stepmother'.

1. *Stepmothers and stepdaughters*

As we saw, stepmothers who mistreat stepdaughters, though common in the folktale, play a relatively minor rôle in the myths. On the other hand, given the strikingly visual representation of the stepmother-stepdaughter conflict in Sophocles' famous *Tyro*,[3] it will be of interest to search for real-life parallels to this, in reality the most difficult of all steprelationships.[4]

Instances are known of stepmothers who raised stepdaughters, in other words, where the potential for disputes existed. When, for instance, Ciron married the sister of Diocles about three to four years after the death of his first wife, his daughter was brought up along with the sons of the second marriage.[5] The speaker in Dem., 57 (41, 43) mentions that his mother, prior to marrying his father, had been divorced by her first husband, after bearing him a daughter and a son, in order that he could marry an heiress: the heiress thus became stepmother to that daughter. In neither of the examples just mentioned do we have any further information about relations between the stepmothers and their stepdaughters.

Two other cases are more illuminating. First, the 12th speech of Isaeus, which concerns Euphiletus, whose name has been struck off the citizen rôle of the Deme Erchia on the grounds that he is νόθος and thus ineligible for citizenship.[6] In the fragment of the speech preserved by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the defendant's plea of unjust disfranchisement is taken up by his half-brother, son of their father's first marriage. Among the arguments he employs to verify the truth

[3] Reference has already been made (chapter 2) to the special mask worn by the actor playing the rôle of Tyro: it must have made a strong visual impact on audiences.

[4] According to modern sociologists: see below note 97.

[5] Isaeus, 8.7.

[6] It was apparently alleged that Euphiletus was not the son of his supposed father Hegesippus by his second wife, but the illegitimate offspring of that wife (either from an adulterous affair or from an irregular relationship prior to her marriage) who had been adopted by Hegesippus. See Wyse (1904) 714, Roussel (1960) 24f.

of his assertions about his half-brother's legitimacy is the fact that supporting evidence has been given by the speaker's brothers-in-law (i.e. the husbands of the speaker's two sisters who were also the products of the first marriage). Since Euphiletus' mother is the stepmother of the two women and since "it is generally customary for there to be disputes between stepmothers and stepdaughters"[7] they would never have allowed their husbands to testify to Euphiletus' legitimacy if they had thought there was a chance that Euphiletus may have been the son of someone other than their own father. Whether or not the stepdaughters in this case were in reality[8] antagonistic to their stepmother is irrelevant. The important fact is that the speaker can use the hostility between stepmothers and stepdaughters to support his case: if such hostility were not recognised as a common phenomenon his argument would carry no weight.

Further evidence of conflict in a stepmother/stepdaughter relationship is found in Lysias 32. This case turns on the alleged embezzlement by a guardian of funds entrusted to him on behalf of the wards in his care. On the death of his brother Diodotus, Diogeiton became the guardian of his nephews and niece (who were also his grandchildren, since Diodotus had married his own niece, Diogeiton's daughter by his first wife). Diogeiton had himself remarried, this union producing sons. When the eldest ward, on coming of age, was informed by Diogeiton that his patrimony had been used up and that he must leave his guardian's house, the ward's brother-in-law took the case to court; he asserted that Diogeiton had initially lied about the sum entrusted to him and that when proof was produced that the amount was considerably greater than he had admitted, Diogeiton had then attempted to explain its disappearance by insisting that it had been spent on the wards' upbringing. Part of Lysias' speech consists of a dramatic recounting of a meeting allegedly arranged between Diogeiton and his daughter (the wards' mother) in the course of which the woman accuses her father of shamefully turning out of his house his own grandchildren, while the children of her stepmother, his second wife, live in comfort: . . . τοὺς μὲν ἐκ τῆς μητρυιᾶς τῆς

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[7] Ch. 5 εἰώθασι δέ πως ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ διαφέρεσθαι ἀλλήλαις αἵ τε μητρυιαὶ καὶ αἱ πρόγονοι I accept Reiske's reading αἱ πρόγονοι ('stepdaughters') for the transmitted οἱ πρόγονοι ('stepchildren') which would give the statement a more general application.

[8] I.e. the speaker might be exploiting his audience's prejudices by hinting at an antagonism that did not really exist.

ἐμῆς παιδεύεις ἐν πολλοῖς χρήμασιν εὐδαίμονας ὄντας· καὶ ταῦτα μὲν καλῶς ποιεῖς· τοὺς δ' ἐμοὺς ἀδικεῖς, οὓς ἀτίμους ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας ἐκβαλὼν ἀντὶ πλουσίων πτωχοὺς ἀποδεῖξαι προθυμεῖ "... the children of my stepmother you are rearing in wealth and prosperity: and it is well that you do this; but my children, on the other hand, you are wronging; casting them dishonoured out of the home you are intent on turning them from rich men into beggars" (§17). Since Diogeiton's sons from his second marriage are his natural heirs, he might be expected to look after them well: the fact that he does so is not strictly relevant to his treatment of the wards, except to provide a contrast with the way he has treated his grandchildren, to whom he owes a moral obligation.[9] The mention of the second family, especially in the terms in which it is cast (the children of my *stepmother*) says much about the daughter's resentful attitude towards her stepmother. It must be remembered, however, that these words are put into the daughter's mouth by Lysias, and the whole speech is in all likelihood a dramatic creation.[10] It is probable, as Carey[11] argues, that the mention of the stepmother is intended to play on the audience's prejudices against stepmothers in order to imply that the second wife is behind Diogeiton's mistreatment of the grandchildren from his first marriage. In this case the parenthetical remark καὶ ταῦτα μὲν καλῶς ποιεῖς ("and it is well that you do this") is added "to preempt any suspicion of envy".[12] It is possible, however, that in composing a speech on behalf of his clients, Lysias took into account the characters of the persons concerned: he may well have detected traces of hostility towards the stepmother on the part of the daughter, and exploited these feelings for his own rhetorical purposes. In any case, the fact that it was felt necessary to add a

[9] They could not of course be his heirs, since they are the sons of a daughter, and would only inherit if he had no sons.

[10] Carey (1989) 10, Todd (1993) 203. (For the assumption that the speech derives from the daughter herself, see V.J. Hunter, "Women's Authority in Classical Greece", *EMC* 8 (1989) 42). On Lysias' portrayal of the daughter, see also S. Usher, "Individual Characterisation in Lysias", *Eranos* 63 (1965), 118–9.

[11] See previous note.

[12] I prefer this interpretation to that of Thompson (1972), 212, who argued that the words τοὺς μὲν ἐκ τῆς μητρυιᾶς τῆς ἐμῆς ('the children of my stepmother') must refer to the stepmother's children from a previous marriage rather than to children which she has had by Diogeiton, on the grounds that the parenthetical remark would be 'impertinent, patronizing or sarcastic' if it referred to a second family of Diogeiton's, there being nothing especially praiseworthy about him preferring his own children to his grandchildren.

parenthesis to avoid showing the daughter in a bad light is proof enough that the audience expected feelings of resentment to be present.

The two speeches just discussed offer evidence that conflicts between stepmothers and stepdaughters were common in Athens.[13] It is especially significant that in both cases hostility appears to be felt by the stepdaughter, rather than the stepmother: contrast myths such as the Tyro/Sidero story, where the entire blame lies with the latter.[14]

2. *Stepmothers and Stepsons*

(i) *Evidence for murderous stepmothers*

The most common manifestation of stepmotherly malevolence in the myths involves a stepmother's attempts to destroy her stepson through jealousy that he will gain the inheritance in preference to her own son. In the society depicted in the myths such jealousy is well-founded: the inheritance at stake is a throne, which normally passes to the first-born son, in other words, to the stepson. Although in the democratic state of Athens a throne was obviously not in question, many citizens must have had considerable wealth to bequeath to their heirs, and stepmothers must often have coveted that wealth on behalf of their own children.[15] Whether such ambitions led to homicide, as in the myths, is, however, doubtful. I have discovered only two pieces of evidence, neither of which is conclusive.

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[13] In Lysias 32, the conflict may have had its roots in the inheritance question. If the second wife had not appeared and produced offspring, the daughter would have been *epikleros* on her father's death (her brothers having died previously) and the inheritance would have passed to her sons. Thus she has good grounds for resenting her father's second marriage on behalf of her children (cf. S.C. Humphreys, "Kinship Patterns in the Athenian Courts" *GRBS* 27 (1986), 71). In the second speech examined (Isaeus, 12), the statement that there are often quarrels between stepmothers and stepdaughters may have a more general application, though given that most of the evidence comes from legal texts involving inheritance cases, we have no way of knowing to what extent conflicts between stepmothers and stepdaughters were the result of personal animosity between the two women which had nothing to do with the inheritance issue.

[14] Cf. also Eur., *Alc.* 313–9, where Alcestis is especially concerned about her daughter should Admetus remarry: she worries that the stepmother might, like Phronime's stepmother, cast aspersions on the girl's reputation and thus ruin her marriage prospects. Further evidence of stepdaughter/stepmother conflict, though from the Hellenistic period, is found in Apollonius. At *Argon.* 1.268–72, Jason's weeping mother is likened to a girl who turns for comfort to her nurse when she has been beaten and insulted by her stepmother; cf. the murderous intentions attributed to stepmothers against their daughters at Argon. 1.813–5, referred to in chapter 1.

[15] As in the myths, Athenian wives in the Classical period could not inherit from

In the first speech of Antiphon, a stepmother is accused of murder, though in this case it is her husband rather than her stepson who is the alleged victim; it is far from certain, moreover, that there was any truth in the charge.[16] The speech concerns the prosecution of a woman by her stepson, on the excuse of filial piety, for poisoning both his father and their next-door neighbour. The alleged murders had taken place some time before; the concubine of the neighbour had been executed for the crime. The stepson argues that his stepmother had tricked the concubine into administering poison both to her lover and to his father by convincing her that the draught was really a love-potion.[17] Although it is impossible to extract the truth, the young man's case is shaky: in particular, no motivation for the crimes is discussed, and more strikingly, he fails to explain why the concubine when examined under torture and threatened with execution did not lay the blame on the guilty party—if she had done so it would surely be in the stepson's interests to mention it.[18]

The other possible example of a real-life murderous stepmother comes from the second half of the 4th century and concerns a woman from Torone in Macedonia. We do not know the full circumstances of the case, but is clear either that she attempted to murder her stepson in a highly unusual manner, or else that the stepson believed she had done so.

Among the miraculous cures recorded in the temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus is the following:

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their husbands, either by will or by intestate succession (MacDowell (1978) 99, 101, Schaps (1979) 22), so the stepmother's ambitions would be for her children rather than herself: contrast Rome, where a wife could be her husband's heir, at least under certain circumstances, and where a childless stepmother might desire to remove a stepson to secure the inheritance for herself.

[16] It even used to be argued (e.g. by U. von Wilamowitz, "Die Erste Rede des Antiphon", *Hermes* 22 (1887), 194–210) that the speech in question is, like Antiphon's tetralogies, a rhetorical exercise, though this view has not won acceptance. For the way in which the argumentation is used to manipulate the audience see Due (1980) esp. 16–26.

[17] This explains why the neighbour died immediately but the father lingered on: the concubine gave a stronger dose to her lover so that it would take effect more speedily.

[18] Due (1980) 26. Even though the stepmother in this case is not accused of harming her stepson, it is an interesting link in the development of the stepmother stereotype. Antiphon's stepmother has characteristics in common with those stepmothers who feature in the Roman declamation (on which see chapter 4 below): she is anonymous; she is a poisoner; she deals in potions (like the stepmothers in Virgil's *Georgics* 3).

> ᾽Ανὴρ Τορωναῖος δεμελέας. οὗτος ἐγκαθεύδων ἐνύπνιον εἶδε· ἔδοξέ οἱ τὸν θεὸν τὰ στέρνα μαχαίραι ἀνσχίσσαντα τὰς δεμελέας ἐξελεῖν καὶ δόμεν οἱ ἐς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ συνράψαι τὰ στήθη· ἁμέρας δὲ γενομένας ἐξῆλθε τὰ θηρία ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν ἔχων καὶ ὑγιὴς ἐγένετο· κατέπιε δ' αὐτὰ δολωθεὶς ὑπὸ ματρυιᾶς ἐγ κυκᾶνι ἐμβεβλημένας ἐκπίων. (*SIG* ³ 1168. 13)
>
> A man of Torone with leeches. Going to sleep [in the temple of Asclepius] he saw a dream: he dreamt that the god opened up his chest with a knife, extracted the leeches, put them into his hands, and sewed up his chest. When day came, he went out holding the creatures in his hands and was cured. He had swallowed them tricked by his stepmother, who had put them in a posset that he drank.

Let us assume the truth of certain basic facts, i.e. that a man from Torone suffered the ill effects[19] of swallowing a leech or leeches and that the parasites were ejected during incubation at the temple of Asclepius, the cure being attributed to the power of the god.[20] As to the accusation against the stepmother, this need not be dismissed as a fictional embellishment.[21] Of the 70 recorded cures at Epidaurus, the present case is the only one in which the disease is attributed to a human source,[22] and though stepmothers in literature are given to administering potions to their stepsons in the form of poison, the posset of *leeches* has an aura of reality, especially as the swallowing of these creatures is attested in ancient medical and other writers as a common occurrence.[23]

Two possible situations underlie the inscription: a) the story is true, b) the man ingested the leeches from another source, but having afterwards been given a κυκεών ('posset') by his stepmother, he alleged that the leeches had been maliciously introduced by her into the brew.

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[19] When swallowed, leeches attach themselves to various parts of the nose and throat, or to the respiratory or digestive tracts; the symptoms, which include bleeding, pain and difficulty in breathing, may be fatal if the leech is not removed. See Faust (1939) 564ff. For a more detailed discussion of the inscription, including what is known of leech infestation and its cures in antiquity, see Watson (1987) 69–78.

[20] The details of the dream-waking sequence, which can be paralleled elsewhere in the Epidaurus inscriptions, may be the work of the temple priests, designed both to glorify their god and to encourage business.

[21] As does Rudolf Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidaurus* (*Philologus* Suppl. 3: 1931) 82.

[22] There is no reason why the priests would have invented the detail about the stepmother in this one case, especially as it does not contribute to the enhancement of the god's reputation.

[23] Cf. Hippocr., *Prorrh.* 2.17., Nic., *Alex.* 495ff., Cels., 5.27.12c., Plin., *Nat.* 20.143., 23.55 etc., Galen, περὶ ἀντιδότων, xiv. 143f. Kühn.

a) If the leeches really were in the κυκεών, then the stepmother must have put them there deliberately, employing a novel method of disposing of her stepson.[24] Being a thick herbal concoction, κυκεών would be an ideal medium in which to secrete leeches. It is unlikely that a leech could have found its way into a made-up brew by accident, given that it is usual in leech-infested areas to strain drinking water[25] and in any case, the drink known as κυκεών was based on wine rather than water.[26]

b) The other possibility is that the stepson accidentally swallowed a leech in the usual way, namely through the careless imbibing of unstrained water or through drinking from a contaminated stream in the open country.[27] When he began to feel unwell, his stepmother gave him a κυκεών as a remedy.[28] On discovering later[29] the cause of his symptoms, he put the blame on the κυκεών: if he harboured hostility towards his stepmother, this would predispose him to believe the worst of her. It is unlikely, however, that he would have failed to remember that he had recently drunk from a contaminated water source. In these circumstances, therefore, the stepson must have purposefully laid the blame on his stepmother, in the full knowledge of her innocence, in order to incriminate her.

To summarise, this inscription bears witness to a situation of conflict between a stepmother and her stepson. It is clearly impossible to decide whether the stepmother was a would-be murderess or an innocent victim: what can be said for certain is that hostility is just as likely to have been entertained by the stepson toward the stepmother as the reverse.

Little indication has been found that stepmothers in reality engaged in murder to obtain the inheritance for their sons. It is significant, however, that the two cases just discussed involve an accusation of

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[24] Or at least making him very sick. Internal hirudiniasis can easily be cured by removing the leech, but it can also be fatal, and this would have been the outcome for which the stepmother was hoping.

[25] See Faust (1939) 568, W.A. Harding and J.P. Moore, *Hirudinea* (London: 1927) xv., cf. Nic., *Alex.* 501ff.

[26] Water was used in the rites of Demeter (*Hymn. Hom. Dem.* 210), but that might have been for a special ritual purpose. The κυκεών described elsewhere is based on wine e.g. Hom., *Iliad.* 11.638., *Od.* 10.234f.

[27] Cf. Nic., *Alex.* 495ff., Galen, περὶ τῶν πεπονθ. τόπων 4.8 (viii.265f.K)., Faust (1939) 566.

[28] For the κυκεών used this way, cf. Hippocr., *Acut.* 39., Ar., *Pax* 712., Pl., *Resp.* 408b., Robert G. Ussher, *The Characters of Theophrastus* (London: 1960) 56.

[29] It would have been possible to imbibe small leeches without realising it until the symptoms began to manifest themselves. See Watson (1987) 77–8.

murder, or attempted murder, by a stepson against his stepmother: if either or both the stepmothers in question were innocent, then we would have evidence for feelings of antagonism on the part of a stepson towards his stepmother which are so strong that he is ready to believe the stepmother capable of homicide.[30]

Before concluding this investigation into murderous stepmothers, I would like to mention one further case. Though this comes from 5th century Macedon rather than Athens, it is of special interest in providing a close parallel with the world of the myths where the inheritance is a royal throne. In the last quarter of the 5th century B.C., Cleopatra 1 of Macedon was married, after the death of her husband Perdiccas, to Archelaus, Perdiccas' illegitimate son, she herself having born Perdiccas a son, who was still a child at the time of his father's death. Apparently Perdiccas had made this arrangement with the intention that Archelaus should take over his own rôle: he would assume the kingship, marry Cleopatra, and raise her son as future ruler. The first two parts of the plan were carried out, but Archelaus was not content merely to act as regent for his half-brother. He pushed the 7-year-old boy down a well, pretending to Cleopatra that the child had fallen in while chasing his pet goose. The hapless queen later bore two (or perhaps three) children to her second husband.[31] Here is a case, then, where a stepmother, rather than murdering her stepson, was married to him (not that she had any choice in the matter) and it was her own child who was removed. The rôle of treacherous murderer was played, in this factual example, by the stepson, who, like the stepmothers of myth, acted out of a desire to remove a rival claimant to the inheritance.[32]

(ii) *reasons for the absence of murderous stepmothers in Athens*

It was suggested earlier that the stepmothers of myth have a powerful motivation for removing their stepsons: a throne is at stake. In addition, myths are a polarisation of reality, problems being resolved by applying extreme solutions, such as murder. For both reasons, it

[30] In the Antiphon example, as we saw, this belief is probably unjustified; in the case of the man with leeches, the real facts cannot be known, but I have shown that it is equally possible that the stepmother is unjustly accused than that she is guilty.

[31] Plato, *Grg.* 471C; cf. Macurdy (1932) 15–16.

[32] From a later period, there is the case of Cleopatra Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy 9 Soter 2, and widow of Ptolemy's brother Ptolemy 10 Alexander 1 (her uncle), who was left her father's only legitimate heir and was forced, in order that the

is hardly surprising that we failed to discover examples of stepmothers in real life who emulated the behaviour of their mythical counterparts. Furthermore, the inheritance laws in Athens ensured that stepmothers had little motivation for plotting the demise of their stepsons. In the first place, there was no notion of primogeniture. According to the intestate rules of succession, the inheritance was shared equally between all legitimate male offspring, whether or not they had the same mother.[33] An Athenian stepmother did not, therefore, find herself in the same position as the stepmother in myth whose stepson took precedence over her own son as his father's sole heir. Second, a stepmother living in 5th century Athens—in contrast to the world of the myths—[34] would not feel her own son's interests threatened by a stepson who was illegitimate, since νόθοι could not inherit. This applied especially after the reforms of Pericles in the mid 5th century, when the definition of illegitimacy was extended to include sons born of non-Athenian mothers.[35] Third, the rules pertaining to the *epikleros* in Athens created a special situation. A daughter became *epikleros* on her father's death if she had no brothers; she could be claimed in marriage by the nearest male relative, their son(s) in due course inheriting her father's estate. If the relative who claimed the hand of an *epikleros* was already married, he had to divorce his wife;[36] the *epikleros* thus became stepmother to any children of his earlier marriage. There must have been numerous cases in which a stepmother was created in this way. This type of stepmother, however, had even less reason than usual for feeling hostility towards a stepson, for any sons that she bore would be the heirs of her father, their grandfather, a position which would not be threatened by the

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throne should be occupied by a male, to marry the son of her deceased husband, a man much younger than herself: the stepson (Ptolemy II) murdered his stepmother within three weeks of the nuptials. See Porphyry, *FGrH* 260 F 2.11., Appian, *BC* 1.102., Macurdy (1932) 174–5, Will (1982) 578f.

[33] Harrison (1968) 131, MacDowell (1978) 92, Todd (1993) 219 and n. 20. The legitimate sons had an automatic right to the succession: cases do exist in which a father gives an elder son slight precedence in his will (Dem., 36.34f., 45.28; cf. Harrison (1968) 152 and n. 1), though a will could be contested if one son was favoured to a disproportionate extent over the others.

[34] The myths do not seem to assume a law which precluded the father from making a νόθος his heir: on this see discussion in Appendix 2.

[35] On Pericles' laws see further below.

[36] Dem., 57.41., Harrison (1968) 132–8, MacDowell (1978) 96, Sealey (1990) 29. Lacey, (1968) 142ff., however, expresses doubts as to whether this applied in every case.

presence of a stepson. Moreover, since her husband was a close relative, the sons of his previous marriage would also be related to her.[37]

In an Athenian family, apart from the circumstance commonly pertaining in the myths, (i.e. a stepmother has a son of her own from her marriage to the stepson's father), there were other possible scenarios. For example, an Athenian woman who became the stepmother of a male child might subsequently bear a daughter who, if the stepson were disposed of, would become an *epikleros*. Although the lot of an heiress might not seem particularly desirable to us, it might have seemed so from the viewpoint of an Athenian mother: at least her daughter would enjoy financial security, and would see her sons inherit the estate. A stepmother with a daughter might, then, have had a motivation for the removal of a stepson.[38] An easier and safer solution than murder, however, would be to arrrange[39] a match between the daughter and the stepson: marriage was allowed between homopatric (but not homometric) siblings. Two certain[40] cases of this are known: the daughter of Themistocles by his second wife Archeptolis was married to the son of Themistocles' first union to Archippe.[41] And in Dem. 57.20, it is recorded that the speaker's grandfather married his half-sister, not of the same mother.[42]

A second type of situation not depicted in the myths is where a stepmother has children from a previous marriage: in Athens, with its high incidence of divorce, this must have occurred, though perhaps without great frequency.[43] These children would not, of course, have any claim to the inheritance of their stepfather, since his own offspring (the woman's stepsons) were his heirs. But with the stepson(s) out of the way (assuming that there were no children of the second marriage), the stepmother might induce her husband to adopt her son (s) as his heir. This would involve first killing the stepson, be-

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[37] And thus she might have less cause to hate them.

[38] The same would apply if the stepchild were also female.

[39] Or more accurately, to persuade her husband to arrange the match, since this duty fell on the father (Lacey (1968) 107, Garland (1990) 215–16).

[40] A third possible instance is the union between Cimon and Elpinice: see n. 79 below.

[41] Plut., *Them.* 32.

[42] In neither of these cases can it be ascertained whether the stepmother had any rôle in arranging the marriage: the decision may have been made by the father (cf. n. 39 above).

[43] In Thompson's examples of remarried men, only 4 out of 23 are known to have married a widow or divorcee; this might show it was common for a man marrying a second time to marry a virgin.

cause adoption was only allowed if there was no legitimate son and heir.[44] In practice, however, a stepmother who tried such a plan would be foolhardy in the extreme. Firstly, if a man adopted his second wife's child after the demise of his son by a previous marriage, the stepmother would be the first to come under suspicion! Secondly, since adoption, like wills, was declared invalid if it could be shown that the adopter acted under the influence of a woman,[45] there would be a strong chance that, on the death of the husband, some blood relative of the deceased[46] would attempt to claim the inheritance by getting the adoption overthrown on these grounds.[47] That such suits were brought is clear from cases like Isaeus 2, in which the brother of Menecles' divorced second wife, who had been adopted by Menecles, defends himself against the claim (by Menecles' brother) that the adoption was invalid because the wife had exerted undue influence over her ex-husband on her brother's behalf; there may have been truth in the assertions of the opponents.[48] The argument of the influence of a woman could even be used where the adoptee was a relative: in Isaeus 7, the estate of Apollodorus is claimed by a cousin, who disputes the adoption by Apollodorus of his nephew on the grounds that he had been persuaded to it by the nephew's mother, Apollodorus' half-sister.[49]

The above discussion has offered reasons why stepmothers were less likely, in practice, to kill their stepsons than the stepmothers depicted in fiction. Unlike the stepmother of myth, whose stepson

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[44] The alternative to murder would be to get the stepson disinherited, but disinherison was rare and discreditable (Lacey (1968) 125) and it is especially unlikely that a father with a second wife could get away with it, since it could doubtless be challenged by the son on the grounds that his father was under the influence of a woman (see next note).

[45] [Dem.], 46.14., Isae., 2.1; cf. Lys., fr. 74 Th., Hyp., 4.17: see Harrison (1968) 87, MacDowell (1978) 101.

[46] To whom the estate would fall, by the rules of intestate succession, in default of legitimate offspring.

[47] Especially given that adoptions normally took place among kin. See L. Gernet, "La Création du Testament", *REG* 33 (1920), 139–43, who lists 21 examples of adoption about which some information is known. In all but 4, the adoptee is a blood relative.

[48] See Wyse (1904) 232–7.

[49] One case is known where a man adopted his stepson without interference from relatives: Isocrates in his old age adopted Aphareus, one of the three sons of his newly-acquired wife Plathane ([Plut.], *Mor.* 839B). Whether Plathane exerted undue influence on her husband in the matter is uncertain; at least she did not need to remove a stepson first, Isocrates' previous unions (which had produced a daughter) being with ἑταῖραι ('courtesans'). See Davies (1971) 246–7.

stood in the way of her own son's inheriting the throne, an Athenian stepmother would at least see her son share the inheritance with his half-brother. If the stepmother's own child was female, she could secure her daughter's future by marrying her to the stepson. As for a stepmother with a son from a previous marriage, even if she coveted the inheritance for him, her only means of obtaining it—to kill the stepson *and* get her own son adopted—was too fraught with peril to be worth trying.

(iii) *evidence for stepmotherly hostility not involving murder*

It was pointed out earlier that conflicts are characteristically resolved in myths by adopting extreme measures. In real life, there may have been stepmothers, especially those with a son from their current marriage, who greedily resented the fact that a stepson would share the inheritance with their own son, but who either failed to translate such feelings into action or else dealt with the situation by methods less extreme than murder.

A search for hostile stepmothers, however, yields largely negative results. Several instances are recorded of women who acquired a stepson from their husband's previous marriage and who subsequently had a son of their own. Often, we have no information apart from the simple fact that a man fathered male children from two marriages.[50] In one case, where more is known of the circumstances, stepmotherly jealousy, if present, was not transferred into action, indeed, the woman's stepson was favoured by his father. After the death of Plato's father Ariston, his mother Perictione married her maternal uncle Pyrilampes, to whom she bore a son, Antiphon. Both had offspring from a previous marriage: in addition to Plato himself, Perictione had two sons and a daughter,[51] while Pyrilampes had a

[50] For instance, the Aristophanes who features in Lysias19 had a homopatric brother (§22). The speaker's maternal grandfather, in the 57th Demosthenic private oration, had sons by two marriages (§37). Philagrus is recorded to have married Telesippe after the death of his first wife who had born a son; Telesippe also had a son, Menestheus ([Dem.], 43. 44–5). Mantias had sons by two wives (Dem., 39–40), as did Aphareus ([Plut.], *Mor.* 839d). Finally, there is the Callias who appears in Andocides' *On the Mysteries*: his son Hipponicus was the product of a first marriage: Callias' third marriage also yielded a son (Davies (1971) 265).

[51] The children were young at the time of their mother's second marriage; it is usually assumed that they were brought up by their mother and stepfather: see MacDowell (1971) 143f., P. Walcot, "Plato's mother and other terrible women", *Greece and Rome* 34 (1987), 15.

son, Demus, who was probably in his early teens at the time of his father's remarriage. Like Pyrilampes, Demus was outstandingly good-looking[52] and it was he rather than Antiphon, the offspring of the second marriage, who inherited his father's famous aviary (Athen. 397c); his appointment as a trierarch in 390 also implies that he was wealthy.[53] Antiphon for his part was known as an avid breeder of horses and he had a town house in Melite.[54]

More promising for the purpose of our enquiry is Isaeus' eighth speech, in which we encounter a woman who (even though her own sons were dead) might have tried to use persuasion on her husband against a potential stepson. The speech concerns the estate of Ciron. He had been married twice: the first wife had died after producing a daughter who had died in turn, leaving several sons; the second wife, half-sister of Diocles, (who survived her husband) had borne two sons, both of whom had been lost in childhood. There was also a nephew, the son of Ciron's late brother. The estate was contested by the nephew and one of the grandsons, the speaker of Isaeus 8. Since it is likely that the grandson could in this case inherit without dispute only if his late father had been adopted by his father-in-law or if the grandson himself had been adopted,[55] the argument was open to the nephew, and had apparently been used by him, that, being related on the male side, he had a better claim to the estate than a grandson who was the son of a female. But the nephew's interpretation of the law concerning precedence of males over females was dubious;[56] he may also have regarded his position as morally weak, and for this reason strengthened his claim by arguing that his uncle's first marriage was illegitimate. In the Isaeus speech, delivered by the grandson, the speaker, being unable to prove beyond doubt

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[52] Ar., *Vesp.* 98; cf. Pl., *Charm.* 158a.

[53] See MacDowell (1971) 143f.

[54] Pl., *Parm.* 126c. Since Perictione was Pyrilampes' niece, her stepson Demus was also her cousin, which would perhaps predispose her in his favour.

[55] The point is very controversial: see Wyse (1904) 608–9, Harrison (1968) 135, Todd (1993) 229–31. If the grandson's mother had been an *epikleros*, he would have inherited from his grandfather automatically, but this was not the case here, since the mother had predeceased her father and daughters only became *epikleroi* on their father's death.

[56] See Wyse (1904) on 7.18–26 and 8.30–4: it is possible that the preference of male over female applied only within a group, i.e. among the group of descendants, male would have precedence over female, and so too among the group of collaterals, whereas all descendants (male or female) would have precedence over all collaterals; cf. Schaps (1979) 23.

the legitimacy of the marriage, adopts the tactic of increasing the strength of his moral position by blackening the character of his opponent. This is not the nephew himself, but the half-brother of Ciron's second wife, Diocles, who is alleged to have been the real villain of the piece: the nephew is a mere pawn used by Diocles to get the estate for himself.[57] The story employed by the grandson, though, is decidedly suspect: according to him, after the death of Diocles' sister's children (the legitimate heirs), Diocles forced her to stay with her husband and to keep pretending to be pregnant so that the husband would not divorce her and adopt the grandson as his heir (ch. 36). Since, however, the heirs died twenty years before, the plot was a long time hatching—surely the husband would have become suspicious of all those pregnancies! Moreover, according to the story, Diocles made his half-sister stay, to get the inheritance for himself, even though he could have married her to someone younger by whom she could have had sons. But how could a brother force his half-sister to leave her husband against the husband's wishes?[58] And why should Ciron have wanted to divorce her in any case—she might have given him more sons, thus avoiding the need to adopt his grandson. Despite the moral (as opposed, perhaps, to the legal) strength of the grandson's position and the likelihood that Diocles was indeed a rogue, his story of Diocles' attempts to secure the inheritance, using his half-sister as accomplice, does not stand up to close analysis.

What really happened? Did Ciron simply not worry about acquiring a legal heir? Or, rather than threatening to divorce her, did he keep hoping Diocles' sister would give him another child? But after 20 years the time would have come when this was no longer possible. Why did he not, at that stage, adopt someone, his grandson for instance, as heir? Was he merely careless, or was he really the victim of Diocles, who got his sister to prevent her husband adopting the grandson? The other possibility is that the sister was not merely the pawn of her half-brother but that she acted on her own initiative for reasons that may be regarded as 'stepmotherly', preferring her

[57] He was said to have induced the nephew to claim it, promising him a small share but with the intention of taking most for himself (ch. 37).

[58] For these arguments, see Wyse (1904) 616–7. Roussel (1960) 155 n. 1 comments that it is doubtful if the guardian who gave a woman in marriage (in this case, her brother) could force her to divorce, even in cases of sterility.

husband to die intestate than for him to adopt as heir the son of her stepdaughter. The unlikelihood of this last scenario, however, is demonstrated by Isaeus' failure to avail himself of what would have been an excellent opportunity to play on the prejudices of his audience against stepmothers.[59]

The case of Diocles' half-sister (together with the accusation made against the stepmother of Diogeiton's daughter in Lysias 32, discussed earlier) comes closest to being a real-life example of stepmotherly hostility, and even here it is improbable that the stepmother was really at fault. On the other hand, several speeches provide evidence of conflicts within stepfamilies which can be attributed to members of the younger generation.

In Isaeus 8, a stepmother's son by her first marriage—the notorious Diocles—is accused of trying to obtain an inheritance for himself by claiming (falsely) that his stepfather adopted him (ch. 40). In addition, he is alleged (ch. 41) to have murdered the husbands of two of his half-sisters and to have robbed the son of one of them of his inheritance in his capacity as guardian: behaviour worthy of any fictional stepmother!

In the last-mentioned example it is not a stepmother who is accused of evil machinations, but her son. The accusation might not, however, have been true;[60] there is clearer evidence, on the other hand, for a woman's *stepchildren* attempting to acquire the inheritance for themselves over their half-siblings, that is the children of their father's second marriage. That such an attempt should have been made is not surprising: it was, after all, the stepchildren, rather than the stepmother, who were the ones with cause for grievance in the event of their father's remarriage. Having been brought up with the expectation of inheriting their father's whole estate, they now saw a

[59] The opportunity existed for conflict, since she had raised the stepdaughter from the age of three or four (see §§ 7–8), along with her own sons.

[60] At least the allegation that Diocles claimed to have been adopted by his step father might have been trumped up. Where a man had only female offspring, he could not legally adopt a son unless that son married one of the daughters, but since Diocles was homometric brother to his stepfather's daughters, marriage to one of them would have been incestuous (unless, in such cases, incest taboos were overridden by the law on adoption: cf. Schaps 31 n. 45—the question cannot be resolved). It would thus have been audacious for Diocles to claim that he had been adopted under these circumstances (So Wyse (1904) 621). In general, though, as Davies (1971) 313f., remarks, "however much we discount the uniform bias of Isaios it is impossible not to regard Diokles as a thorough scoundrel".

second wife produce children with whom their inheritance must be shared. I have already noted two examples where hostility towards stepmothers on the part of stepdaughters is attested, in one case,[61] for this very reason. I turn now to the evidence for similar feelings on the part of stepsons.

The first piece of testimony is a brief mention of two homopatric brothers who are among several rival claimants for an estate.[62] The second comes in a speech already discussed, Isaeus 12, where the speaker, testifying to the legitimacy of his half-brother, argues that, as son of the first marriage of his father, it would hardly be in his interests to lie about the matter, since if his half-brother Euphiletus were proved to be illegitimate, there would be one less person to share the inheritance. Here, the relationship between the half-brothers is obviously cordial, but the speaker's words point to the sort of feelings that might be expected to arise on the part of a son of a first marriage whose father marries for the second time.

A third case must be discussed at greater length. Isaeus 6 concerns rival claims to the estate of Euctemon by his grandson Chaerestratus and two young men claiming to be Euctemon's sons by a second wife, Callipe. Euctemon died at the age of 96, all three sons of his first marriage having predeceased him. The last of these was Philoctemon who had adopted his sister's son Chaerestratus, the claimant in the case. The strategy employed by Chaerestratus, apart from stressing the fact of the adoption,[63] is to allege that the rival claimants are not the offspring of a legitimate marriage. A compelling argument by his opponents (the guardians of the two young men in question—this second marriage, if it took place, did so when Euctemon was in his 70's) was that the eldest boy had been formally accepted into Euctemon's phratry, which would not normally happen if there was any question of his legitimacy. Since Chaerestratus does not

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[61] Lys., 32: cf note 13 above.

[62] [Dem.], 48.10.

[63] It was necessary to stress this for two reasons: (i) even if Philoctemon adopted Chaerestratus in his will, Chaerestratus did not have it ratified at the time, either because his own father's estate (which he would have had to relinquish) was worth more than Philoctemon's, or because Chaerestratus' parents did not want Euctemon to become guardian of their son and preferred to wait till Euctemon's death when Chaerestratus could make his claim to the estate (Cf. Lacey (1968) note 15 to ch 6; Davies (1971) 563, however, thinks the allegation that Philoctemon adopted Chaerestratus must be treated with suspicion). (ii) the claim in the speech is for the estate of Philoctemon, though it is really Euctemon's fortune which is in question, since he outlived his son by several years.

attempt to deny this, it must be a fact that the boy was enrolled. Rather, his story—a tale of intrigue and feminine wiles which are stepmotherly in spirit if not in fact—is that the marriage with Callipe is a fiction; the boy's real mother was the ex-prostitute Alce, who along with her cronies, the boy's guardians, enticed the old man Euctemon by φάρμακα ('potions') or some other means to acknowledge one of her sons by a freedman as a legitimate son of his, getting him enrolled in his phratry. When Philoctemon, who was still alive at the time, objected to this, the old man threatened to remarry and produce an heir whose entitlement could not be questioned. So Philoctemon allowed it to happen, but on the condition that the new son only got bequeathed a small amount of the inheritance.

If Chaerestratus' story is true, we would have a fine example of stepmotherly machinations, right down to the φάρμακα. But it is more likely that the whole thing is a concoction.[64] At any rate, it appears that Chaerestratus was unsuccessful in his suit, since in a later inscription he is called the son of Phanostratus (rather than son of Philoctemon), in other words, the adoption was not recognised.[65] It is very likely that here is a case where a long-lived father has produced offspring late in life from a second union, much to the chagrin of his relatives, especially the grandson, who has even more cause to resent this than would a son of the first marriage, because as grandson he cannot now even share the inheritance.[66] The speech

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[64] Lacey (1968) 128, who calls Chaerestratus 'an unusually egregious liar', points out (n. 2 to ch. 6) that if Euctemon really acted as alleged by Chaerestratus it is surprising the latter did not prosecute him for insanity. The story of Alce is accepted without question by R.F. Wevers, *Isaeus: Chronology, Prosopography and Social History* (The Hague/Paris: 1969) 103f.: his book is a good example of the 'truly Arcadian innocence' attributed by Wyse (1904) 483 to those who display 'confidence in the veracity and virtue of Isaeus' clients'.

[65] *IG* ii no. 1177.11: cf. Wyse (1904) 488, Davies (1971) 564.

[66] Lacey (1968) 143, argues that the boy enrolled in Euctemon's phratry was in fact son of Euctemon and Callipe; since, as we learn from the speech, she was an impoverished *epikleros*, Euctemon may not have married her by the formal procedure of *epidikasia*, but Philoctemon may have felt a moral obligation to recognise the claim of her son. Davies (1971) 563, suggests that Callipe either died or was divorced, before the death of Philoctemon (hence Androcles' ignorance of her in §12–13). In any case, Philoctemon's status as heir was effected only to the extent that he had to agree to Callipe's son receiving a small share of the inheritance. The threat to the inheritance prospects of the grandson, on the other hand, was more serious, especially as he had not had his adoption ratified at the time of Philoctemon's death, and also since the phratry had accepted the son as legitimate.

is interesting, whatever the true facts. It affords a vivid illustration of the sort of conflicts brought about by remarriage. Regardless of whether the grandson's story is true, his alleged explanation of how Alce got away with her intrigues—Euctemon's threat to his son Philoctemon that he would take a second wife—demonstrates the resentment felt by a stepson that the offspring of a new marriage will share his inheritance. Moreover, the case provides evidence once again that it is often the children—and grandchildren—of a first marriage, rather than a stepmother, who will resort to any possible means in order to obtain an inheritance for themselves.

A further example of stepfamily conflict initiated by members of the younger generation is the prosecution of Phormio, concerning which private Demosthenic orations are preserved on both sides;[67] in this case, the step-parent is male. The background is as follows. When Pasio died, leaving one adult son, Apollodorus, and one boy of ten years old (Pasicles), he appointed in his will, as one of the guardians of the younger son, his business manager Phormio, to whom he also gave the hand of his widow Archippe in marriage. The fertility of the marriage between Phormio and Archippe gave rise to disputes: not only did a son of the marriage attempt a claim on money belonging to his mother after her death, but in the present suit Phormio's elder stepson Apollodorus prosecuted his stepfather on behalf of his brother and mother. The bitter attacks made against Phormio for allegedly mistreating his wife and ward are in all probability the invention of the stepson—a striking example of resentment on the part of a stepchild towards a step-parent, this time a stepfather.[68]

In the case just cited, the stepfather seems to have been indicted unfairly. From the 58th private Oration ascribed to Demosthenes, however, we have a stepfather who—assuming that the court's judgment was correct—was almost certainly guilty of attempting to deprive a stepson of his inheritance, in somewhat unusual circumstances.

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[67] Dem., 36, 45, 46. For the authorship of these speeches, see Trevett (1992) 50–76 (he attributes the last to Apollodorus rather than Demosthenes). For the family, see also Davies (1971) 427.

[68] Cf. especially 45.3–4 for the elder son's outrage at his mother's remarriage to Phormio. Trevett (1992) 174–6 remarks on the vehemence of Apollodorus' attack, and adds that his attitude towards his stepfather "verges on the paranoid". He suggests (p. 47) that Apollodorus may have been short of money and "thought that the only way to salvage his fortunes would be to sue his rich and hated stepfather Phormion, whose success he clearly resented".

Charidemus, son of Ischomachus, had been adopted by his maternal grandfather Aeschylus. The father of Epichares had proposed a decree granting public maintenance to Charidemus in recognition of the services to the state of his late father: if this were passed, Charidemus would have to return to his father's family, losing his claim to the estate of his adoptive father (who had presumably died) which would revert to Charidemus' mother, Aeschylus' only surviving child and thus the *epikleros*. The proposed decree was challenged successfully by Theocrines, who convinced the jury that the father of Epichares was acting in collusion with the second husband of Charidemus' mother, Polyeuctus. The decree ostensibly honouring Charidemus was in reality a plot on the part of the stepfather to deprive the stepson of his rightful inheritance: as the husband and guardian of Charidemus' mother, Polyeuctus would have control of the property if it passed to her.[69]

In several of the cases discussed above, an inheritance was sought by attempting to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the rival claimant. This brings me to one final aspect of the stepmother myths which I have not mentioned as yet in respect of its relationship to factual reality, namely the fact that in many of the myths the stepson is a νόθος: in one of Euripides' *Phrixus* plays this version is even preferred to the more usual one in which the union of Athamas to Phrixus' mother was represented as a legitimate marriage.[70] There may be a link here with contemporary events. During the 5th century the position of bastards deteriorated. It is probable that under Solon's legislation (early 6th century) νόθοι were excluded from the inheritance in the presence of legitimate sons, but that in the absence of these, they could inherit as members of the *anchisteia* (close family). By the end of the 5th century, however, νόθοι were debarred from inheriting in any circumstances: this rule may have been introduced by Cleisthenes a hundred years earlier.[71] Moreover, the number of νόθοι was increased, in 451/50, through Pericles' law whereby only those whose parents were both Athenian citizens were

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[69] For this family, see Davies (1971) 6–7; he regards Theocrines' arguments as 'entirely credible'.

[70] Euripides, *TGF*² F 824; other cases where the stepson is a νόθος include Penelope, Medea, Hippodamia, Creusa, Hermione, Endeis, Rhea and Hera (as well as the 'amorous' stepmothers Phthia and Phaedra).

[71] On the inheritance laws as they affected νόθοι, see Just (1989) 40–55 and most recently, Patterson (1990), 55ff.

counted as legitimate. As was pointed out earlier, these developments should have given stepmothers *less* cause to resent their stepsons than in myths where the stepson is a νόθος since illegitimate sons were not in Athens a threat to their own legitimate children. On the other hand, given the difficulty of proving the legitimacy of a marriage,[72] the introduction of laws such as those of Pericles might have provided stepmothers with a *greater* opportunity to attack stepsons: they could attempt to deprive a stepson of his inheritance by alleging in a law suit that he was the product of a non-legitimate union and so unentitled to a share. Alternatively, a wife whose husband had fathered a son from a previous irregular union might feel threatened if the mother of that son tried to claim that her relationship with the husband was a legal marriage.[73]

There is, however, no concrete evidence for stepmothers attempting to prove their stepsons illegitimate. The prominence in 5th century myth of stepsons who are νόθοι may be regarded as a reflection, not so much of stepmotherly behaviour in real life, as of the insecurities generated by an issue which was pressing at the time.[74] Note, too, that cases where the illegitimacy argument was employed feature half-brothers rather than stepmothers.[75]

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[72] Since there was no official register of births deaths and marriages: cf. MacDowell (1978) 102.

[73] As Plangon was alleged to have done ([Dem.], 40 §2). When Boeotus, son of Mantias and his first partner Plangon, claimed the right to use his grandfather's name Mantitheus, as was customary for the eldest legitimate son, the son of Mantias' second wife, also named Mantitheus, took him to court and attempted to prove that Plangon had been a mistress who had deceitfully tricked her husband into acknowledging her sons as legitimate. It is possible, however, that Plangon was the first wife of Mantias who had been repudiated, along with her son, because of suspected adultery; after the death of Mantias' second wife the relationship with Plangon was resumed, and the son (whose name had been changed after his repudiation from that of his grandfather, Mantitheus, to Boeotus) was recognized, in due course obtaining a share of the inheritance. See J. Rudhardt, "La reconnaissance de la paternité dans la société athénienne", *MH* 19 (1962), 39–64, Davies (1971) 364–8, C. Carey and R.A. Reid, edd., *Demosthenes: Selected Private Speeches* (Cambridge: 1985) 160–64. For a different interpretation (i.e. that Mantias had deliberately avoided regularizing his relationship with Plangon because her father was in heavy debt to the state), see S.C. Humphreys, "Family Quarrels", *JHS* 109 (1989), 182–5.

[74] It has been suggested that plays such as Euripides' *Andromache* and *Ion* reflect real-life problems involving legitimacy and inheritance: cf. Humphreys (1983) 63f., Patterson (1990), 66, Seaford (1990) 159, 169f.

[75] Isae., 6., Isae., 8., cf. Isae., 12. In one case (Isae., 3) the argument is used by an aunt, rather than a stepmother. Cf. also the dispute between Mantitheus and Boeotus, discussed in note 73 above.

To summarise, there is little evidence for stepmothers in 5th century Athens resorting to murder to obtain the inheritance for their own child. Since, however, myth is a polarisation of reality, any examples of stepmotherly hostility would be significant, for these could provide a factual background for the extremes of behaviour depicted by the Tragedians who make use of stepmother myths. Evidence is meagre, however, even for more moderate types of stepmotherly activities. On the other hand, several of the speeches which have been examined testify to conflicts in stepfamilies over the question of inheritance, where the fault is attributable to a stepfather or to stepfamily members of the younger generation.[76] It was also suggested that the popularity in the myths, as used by the Tragedians, of stepsons who are illegitimate, is a reflection of an important real-life issue. Here too, in the cases discussed, it is members of the stepfamily other than stepmothers who avail themselves of the opportunity provided by the Periclean laws to deprive a stepson of an inheritance by proving the illegitimacy of his parents' marriage. The myths, then, in making the stepmother the universal scapegoat for stepfamily conflict, display a prejudice which appears to be unfounded.

3. *The amorous stepmother*

Finally, a few words about the 'amorous' stepmother. Given that girls in Classical Athens were married very young, and to husbands who were considerably older than themselves, there are likely to have been many cases in which a young second wife was closer in age to her stepson than to her husband.[77] This scenario may have been common where an *epikleros* was claimed by a middle-aged uncle who had a son of his own close to her age. That a young bride in an arranged marriage could under such circumstances fall in love, Phaedra-like, with her stepson/cousin, and/or he with her, is not

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[76] Earlier, we observed this phenomenon in disputes between stepmothers and stepdaughters as well. Compare too the first speech of Antiphon discussed earlier: if, as is likely, the stepmother was innocent, the fact that the stepson was ready to prosecute his stepmother for murder demonstrates hostility on the part of the stepson towards his stepmother. Cf also a story in Plutarch, *Cat. Mai.* 24, that Peisistratus had to mollify his grown sons, when he took a second wife, with the excuse that he wanted to produce more sons for the state of equal virtue to themselves.

[77] Given also that men marrying for a second time often chose a virgin: cf. note 43 above.

improbable.[78] But although an Athenian Phaedra could have existed in theory, a search for evidence in the 5th and 4th century fails to reveal any examples of a sexual relationship between stepson and stepmother, nor in fact for *any* morally reprehensible[79] sexual relationships within stepfamilies. This may, of course, be simply accidental, resulting from the nature of the source material.

B. *Factors Operative in the Creation of Prejudice Against the Stepmother*

At the beginning of this chapter, the question was posed: how is the special popularity of the stepmother theme in 5th century literature related to everyday reality? In the light of the preceding discussion, we can conclude that the prominence of stepmother myths in Tragedy and elsewhere is a reflection of the fact that stepfamilies, and stepfamily disputes over inheritance issues, were a common phenomenon in 4th and 5th century Athens. In the area of stepfamily 'incest', whether or not illicit relationships took place in reality, the myths may be viewed as having their background in commonly held fears about the sexual consequences of remarriage, especially where the bride was close in age to the stepson. On the other hand, in view of the fact that wicked stepmothers are rarely encountered, but that, on the contrary, there is evidence for conflict sparked off by members of the family other than the stepmother,[80] it is clear that the myths present a view of reality which is distorted by an underlying prejudice against stepmothers, a prejudice which also informs

[78] Cf. Craik (1984) 14 and 27 n. 4, who also points to the confined living conditions in Athenian homes as possibly engendering 'incestuous or para-incestuous leanings'.

[79] Marriages between homopatric half-siblings, being legal, are not relevant in this connection. There is one possible case of an illegal relationship between homometric siblings. Cimon and his half-sister Elpinice lived as husband and wife: if this was a legal marriage (see Plut., *Cimon* 4.8 and Nepos, *Cimon* 1.2) their common parent must have been the father. On the other hand, a hostile tradition (known from Eupolis' *Poleis* F208, I 315K) charged them with incest, in which case they must have been homometric siblings. Davies (1971) 302–4 thinks that the evidence, though uncertain, is slightly balanced in favour of the view that the relationship was incestuous; it is accepted as such by Craik (1984) 27 n. 4.

[80] In the area of sexual relationships, although no 'amorous stepsons' were found in Athens, the father's ready credence of the stepmother's false accusation in myths of the Phaedra type might demonstrate, if not Oedipal feelings, at least a common acceptance of the idea that a stepson might be sexually attracted to his stepmother rather than the reverse. That the possibility was countenanced is also shown by

the generally negative perception of the stepmother already discussed in chapter 1. Let us turn now to possible ways that such a bias may have arisen.

1. *Social realities: modern sociological studies of the stepfamily*

In exploring the factors responsible for prejudice against stepmothers, invaluable assistance can be obtained from modern sociological studies of the stepfamily, since these take account of the emotions and tensions commonly found today within such families, and which—making due allowance for differences in social *mores*—may be expected to have existed in Athens as well.[81] The point is frequently made by contemporary sociologists that the negative perception of the stepmother as invariably wicked, while obviously a gross exaggeration, has a factual basis to the extent that there are elements inherent in the stepfamily situation which may help to reinforce this concept. These involve personal conflicts which have nothing to do with inheritance disputes, but are generated by the pressures of day by day living.

Leaving aside for the moment the 'amorous stepmother', I have shown that bias against stepmothers in the ancient texts assumes two

Artemidorus' reference (*Oneir.* 4.20) to a dream of intercourse with one's stepmother. From elsewhere, we have two 'historical' examples of stepsons who lusted after their stepmothers, though both may be fabrications: Justin (10.1) tells of the desire of Darius, the son of Artaxerxes 2 for his stepmother. The king was so affectionate and indulgent towards his son Darius that he decided to share with him his kingdom while still alive. Darius demanded that his father give him his wife along with all the other accoutrements of kingly power that he had already bestowed on him. The king promised to do so in a rash moment but soon repented. In order to avoid handing over the woman without breaking his word, he made her priestess of a cult requiring sexual purity. Darius, on learning of the way in which he had been tricked, at first reproached his father; later in order to get revenge he and 50 of his 115 illegitimate half-brothers devised a plot to kill the king. They were betrayed and executed along with their wives and families, while Artaxerxes himself perished of a broken heart. The other case is the famous story of the love of Antiochus for his stepmother Stratonice (discussed below, chapter 7)

[81] Their existence must be conjectural, given the nature of the source material, which consists mainly of court cases centering on inheritance disputes. Because of the retiring lives led by respectable Athenian female citizens we possess little information about individual women except when they are involved in male arenas such as the law court, and even there, they are rarely mentioned by name unless their morals are questionable or they are connected with the opponents' side (this is partly due to etiquette/respect, but does reflect women's rôle in society: see D. Schaps, "The Women least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names", *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 27 (1977), 323-330.

main forms: that stepmothers invariably hate their stepchildren and that disputes in stepfamilies are always attributable to the stepmother rather than to other family members. Modern studies offer important insights in both cases.

(i) *stepmotherly hatred*

While acknowledging an underlying bias in the view that stepmothers automatically harbour feelings of malevolence towards their stepchildren, recent writers universally stress that this view does embody a degree of truth. In psychological terms, it would be surprising if a stepmother were able to feel the same love for a stepchild as for a natural child, since in the case of the latter the phenomenon of 'bonding' is operative.[82] This does not necessarily mean, of course, that the stepmother automatically hates her stepchild. On the other hand, most stepmothers are subject to emotions which have the potential to turn into hatred. These include a) sexual jealousy of the husband's relationship with his former wife: this is transferred to a stepchild, the visible proof of that relationship, especially if the child physically resembles its mother[83] b) resentment of the presence in her household of another woman's children, epecially if these are badly behaved or do not conform to the new wife's standards of behaviour c) jealousy of the husband's relationship with his children. The stepmother might simply resent the amount of time he devotes to his children rather than to herself;[84] in the special case of a woman married to a much older man, and closer in age to his daughters than to her husband, problems will arise if her motives for marrying are because the man represents a father figure.[85] If not controlled or

[82] The relevance of 'bonding' to 5th century Athens is debatable. Given the high infant mortality rate and the common use of wet-nurses, it is possible that 'bonding' did not take place, at least in the first year or two of life: Pomeroy (1975) 101, cf. M.I. Finley, "The Elderly in Classical Antiquity", *Greece and Rome* 29 (1981), 159; Keith R. Bradley, "Wet-nursing at Rome: A Study in Social Relations" in B. Rawson ed., *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (London/Sydney: 1986) 220, argues that the practice of wet-nursing was a precaution against the mother becoming too attached to the child in case it did not survive. But there is evidence that the mother-child relationship was felt to be a strong one: see Garland (1990) 147ff.; M. Golden, *Childhood in Classical Athens*, (Baltimore: 1990) 82–100, argues convincingly that factors such as infant mortality and child exposure did not necessarily preclude strong emotional attachment between parents (especially mothers) and young children.

[83] Pfleger (1947), 175, Maddox (1980) 97, Conolly (1983) 122, Hodder (1985) 112.

[84] Burns (1985) 32, Collins (1988) 125, Smith (1990) 89.

[85] Deutsch (1947) vol 2, 385; Hodder (1985) 112, cites the case of a woman of 34

understood, all these emotions can lead to obsessive hatred on the part of the stepmother,[86] and may be translated into hostile behaviour.

The notion of stepmotherly hatred, then, is not entirely without basis. On the other hand, though most stepmothers experience negative feelings towards their stepchildren on occasion, and even engage in fantasies that their stepchildren disappear permanently,[87] cases where such feelings lead to mistreatment of the stepchildren seem to be exceptional. More common are instances of behaviour which may appear 'stepmotherly' but which arises from factors other than hatred. Many problems are associated with guilt, an emotion to which stepmothers are especially prone. This may arise from an inability on the stepmother's part to admit that a preference for her own children is entirely natural and not in any way culpable. In cases where a father has custody of his children after a divorce, another type of guilt may be present, namely that the stepmother has deprived the real mother of her children.[88] Guilt can lead to various types of reaction. The stepmother may avoid showing affection openly to her own children so that the stepchildren will not feel jealous. Although well-intentioned, this can result in growing feelings of resentment on the stepmother's part towards the stepchildren, whom she sees as interfering with her maternal relationship with her own children.[89] Alternatively, she may start to find fault constantly with the stepchildren for alleged misdemeanours in a subconscious attempt to convince herself that her feelings of dislike for them are justified.[90] Finally, her guilty conscience may lead her to overcompensate and

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married to a man of 52 whose two daughters, in their 20's, lived at home. Unable to recognise, let alone come to terms with, her feelings of jealousy (because she was looking for a father image, she viewed the daughters as rivals for her husband's affection), she constantly found fault with the stepdaughters, in the honest belief that they were entirely at fault. One daughter married the first man who asked her and the other left home, telling all she met about her 'wicked stepmother' who had driven her out of her own house.

[86] Hodder (1985) 54, Smith (1990) 37. Most stepmothers experience feelings of hatred towards their stepchildren on occasion, but so do mothers: the difference is that mothers have positive feelings with which to balance this hatred; the stepmother, on the other hand, has no such feelings because the relationship is still new and has not been confirmed by the 'bonding' process.

[87] Conolly (1983) 76.

[88] Deutsch (1947) 385.

[89] Or else she may resent them because they expose her inability to live up to social and emotional expectations (i.e. that she will love them instantly and be a mother to them): see Smith (1990) 59.

[90] Hodder (1985) 50, 112.

attempt to replace the real mother: stepmothers who try this are often rejected as second best.[91] Another situation fraught with danger is where the new stepmother, all too acutely aware of the stereotype, strives to ensure that it does not apply in her own case. She overdoes her efforts to win the childrens' affection, they reject her as alien; this in turn leads to the children developing behavioural problems and a situation of conflict then arises for which the stepmother receives the blame, with the ironic result that she eventually achieves the very thing she was trying to avoid—being labelled a wicked stepmother.[92]

Finally, many perfectly innocent women are regarded as 'wicked stepmothers' by outsiders who wilfully misinterpret their behaviour. Well-intentioned efforts by the stepmother to discipline her stepchildren or to impose an unfamiliar household regime may be interpreted by others (e.g. friends, the child's grandparents) as a sign of cruelty, whereas a similar course of action on the part of the real mother would be overlooked or would even elicit praise as a worthy attempt to avoid spoiling the child.[93] The unfortunate stepmother is in an impossible situation, since failure on her part to exercise sufficient discipline could also lead to behavioural problems for which she would in turn incur blame. The problem is a common one, given that children faced with a stepmother often harbour feelings of resentment (see further below) which in turn lead to behaviour on their part that requires unusual disciplinary measures.

To summarise so far, modern studies demonstrate that the bias against stepmothers is grounded in truth to the extent that most stepmothers do prefer their own children to their stepchildren, that they often harbour feelings of resentment towards their stepchild and that these feelings are in extreme cases translated into action. Furthermore, though the concept of stepmotherly wickedness is simplistic in its assumption that mistreatment of stepchildren inevitably arises from hatred on the stepmother's part, the concept is nevertheless reinforced by the fact that stepmothers often appear malevolent, either

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[91] Books concerned with stepmothering skills emphasise that the worst course of action is to try to replace the real mother: Maddox (1980) 62, Burns (1985) 6, Collins (1988) 20, Smith (1990) 2, 20 etc.

[92] Hodder (1985) 49, Smith (1990) 196. The difficulties may be exacerbated if the stepmother expects to receive too much love and/or gratitude: Schulman (1972), 135, Ochiltree (1990) 10 etc.

[93] Pflcger (1947), 171, Conolly (1983) 71, Smith (1990) 26.

because their failure to cope with emotions such as guilt leads to conflict with their stepchildren or because well-meaning behaviour is misinterpreted by others.

(ii) *The stepmother as scapegoat*

The second area in which bias against stepmothers was seen to operate in a Greek context was in the attribution of blame for family disputes entirely to the stepmother rather than to other members of the stepfamily. Here too recent studies offer helpful insights.

In the first place, they confirm that *all* stepfamily members are subject to emotions which may lead to tension and conflict. In particular, children are in reality just as likely to experience hostility towards the stepmother as the reverse; it is they who are frequently the ultimate cause of disputes. There are many reasons why a stepchild might hate a stepmother. Firstly, there is the fact that the stepmother is by definition an intruder[94] who imposes a new domestic regime on the household into which she enters. This can cause resentment on the part of the stepchild; the problem will be particularly acute in the case of young children, who are generally less able to adapt to change than adults, or in cases where discipline has been relaxed because the children have been living for some time with their father alone or have been cared for by indulgent grandparents.[95] In the second place, stepchildren, bereft of their mother, are insecure: this insecurity often takes the form of a fear of losing the surviving parent also.[96] In consequence, they are jealous of the new wife's relationship with their father, which in their eyes imposes a threat to their own relationship with him. This situation is particularly likely to come about if the death (or divorce) of the mother is either of recent occurrence or if an especially close relationship between father and child has developed over a number of years. It is also common where the stepchild is a teenage girl, since she views the stepmother as a rival for her father's affection.[97] Thirdly, like stepmothers, children are influenced by negative preconceptions of

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[94] Burns (1985) 171, Maddox (1980) 79, Smith (1990) 17.

[95] E.g. Deutsch (1947) 395, Pfleger (1947), 175, Maddox (1980) 90ff., Burns (1985) 13, Smith (1990) 122.

[96] Conolly (1983) 53, Burns (1985) 69.

[97] Cf. Burns (1985) 186f on the Electra complex. The stepmother/ stepdaughter relationship is more difficult in general than that between stepmothers and stepsons: Burns (1985) 76, Hodder (1985) 111.

the stepmother. These preconceptions, often obtained from fairy stories,[98] lead them to judge the stepmother in advance, expecting that she will conform to the stereotype. Any sign of 'wickedness' on the stepmother's part, such as disciplinary attempts, will be taken by them as proof that their expectations have been justified. Even if the stepchildren like their new stepmother (and this happens in about 50% of cases), this positive reaction may involve a sense of disloyalty towards their real mother, leading the children to resent the stepmother for causing them feelings of guilt.[99]

Finally, some types of hostility on the part of stepchildren are the direct result of special situations. First, cases where the mother has died. If a new stepmother is imposed too soon, the stepchild may not have completed the necessary period of mourning for the mother,[100] and consequently will not be in a position to form a new relationship. On the other hand, where the real mother is long dead, she may have been idealised in the mind of the child, who compares the stepmother unfavourably with the mother of fantasy.[101] This process of idealisation is often aided by the father. As Conolly puts it: "Just because the marriage ended with the death of one partner doesn't mean that the marriage had been 'a bed of roses'... Death has an aura of mystery about it which leads to distortion of memories. Released from the everyday task of having to work at the relationship, with continual reminders of the less enjoyable aspects, the surviving spouse is free to remember all the good parts and can conveniently forget any sad spots. An incoming spouse can have an impossible task trying to live up to a saint. Children who have a parent die can be very resistant to having a step-parent. Nobody, but nobody, is able to compete with a saint".

Second, there is the situation where the mother has departed from the scene as a result of divorce. In such cases the child commonly harbours a fantasy that the parents will get together again; the stepmother is resented because she shatters this cherished hope. Alternatively, children may feel rejected by their own mother, and may project their consequent feelings of insecurity and anger onto the unfortunate stepmother.[102] This sets up a vicious circle: the child displaces

98 Conolly (1983) 70, Ochiltree (1990) 28, 143 etc.
99 Burns (1985) 60, Hodder (1985).
100 Maddox (1980) 86, Hodder (1985) 49, 58, Smith (1990) 84.
101 Deutsch (1947) 385, Schulman (1972), Burns (1985) 59–60, Smith (1990) 12.
102 Conolly (1983) 126–7, Hodder (1985) 47, Smith (1990) 14.

its anger onto the stepmother; she tells the child's father who admonishes the child; the child reacts by displacing more anger onto the stepmother who in turn grows more resentful, and so on. In this case, the result might be that a well-meaning stepmother eventually becomes 'wicked' as the result of a situation which was originally the fault of the stepchild rather than herself.

To summarise, I quote Hodder: "most children would resent their stepmother even if she were an angel sent straight from heaven. They are not in a position, often, to like anybody. Frequently they have been hurt and upset. They are obsessive about their father. They jealously guard the memory of their mother. They may feel insecure and unhappy about their future. A new stepmother is a threat in all kinds of ways."

Stepfathers are just as much a prey to feelings of jealousy as are stepmothers,[103] and conflicts often arise between them and their stepchildren. For instance, a stepfather may harbour hostility towards his wife's child by a previous marriage through sexual jealousy of her former relationship. Or he may simply feel resentful that his wife gives attention to her children at his own expense. Although the stepmother-stepchild relationship is said to be more difficult in that it is harder for children to accept a stepmother than a stepfather, it is interesting that in extreme cases where a step-parent mistreats or even kills a stepchild, it is more commonly a stepfather who is involved. Cases are frequently reported in the media today of violence on the part of stepfathers, sometimes with the mother's connivance. The prevalence of stepfathers in child abuse or murder may result from the fact that in contemporary society the mother usually has custody in cases of divorce (which are far more common than those involving the death of a parent). Often the stepfathers in question are young and/ or poor and unable to look after a child properly; the man takes out his frustration and anger on the innocent child whom he sees as thrust on him unwillingly or perhaps blames for their troubles.[104]

Children in stepfamilies can be jealous of step- or half-siblings. A child might resent their mother sharing her love with a second husband and his children. Alternatively, stepchildren may be jealous if the step-parent gives too much attention to his or her real children.

[103] Conolly (1983) 172, Collins (1988) 124, Smith (1990) 18.
[104] Maddox (1980) 172.

And in cases where the new couple proceed to have a child of their own, children of a former marriage may find it hard to accept their new half-sibling: even in 'normal' families, it is natural for children to be jealous of a baby brother or sister who absorbs their parents' attention; this feeling is exacerbated in a stepfamily because of the greater feelings of insecurity experienced by stepchildren.[105] Finally, where the stepchildren are adults, they may well resent any half- or stepsiblings as a threat to their own inheritance prospects.[106]

Contemporary studies confirm that the blame for stepfamily disputes does not always rest with the stepmother, and in addition they explore the emotions that lead other stepfamily members to initiate conflict. They also point out, however, that even today it is most commonly stepmothers who are subject to criticism, especially in cases of conflict between stepmothers and stepchildren; the image of stepfathers, by contrast, is less inclined to be a negative one. Various attempts at an explanation have been given. Firstly, although stepchildren, as we have seen, have as much reason to feel hostility as the stepmother, sociologists point out that outsiders are prone to take their part, either through pity for children who have been deprived of their natural mother, through a belief in the innocence of children, or simply (to use a rather circular argument) because they are preconditioned by the myth to expect hostile behaviour from a stepmother.[107] As for stepfathers, several reasons have been suggested to explain why they do not have the same reputation as stepmothers, despite the fact that they are subject to the same emotions (e.g. jealousy). These suggestions range from the practical (stepmothers are more closely involved in the day-to-day care and disciplining of the children;[108] traditionally women take the responsibility for the emo-

[105] Burns (1985) 59. Often, however, it improves the situation and children like the new baby: Burns (1985) 155f., 159ff.

[106] Smith (1990) 17.

[107] Burns (1985) 6–8, Smith (1990) 2f., 21, 23. The tendency to adopt the viewpoint of the stepchild rather than the stepmother is exemplified in the definition of 'stepmother' given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "a woman who has married one's father after one's mother's death or divorce': taken from the viewpoint of the stepmother, the term might be defined as "a woman whose husband has children from a previous marriage".

[108] Maddox (1980) 171, Conolly (1983) 88, Smith (1990) 18, 60f. This is especially relevant to Athens, where stepmothers had closer links than stepfathers with their stepchildren, not only because women's life was centred on the home, but also because stepmothers were more often resident with their stepchildren: custody of the children after a divorce was with the father, and although widows outnumbered widowers (M. Golden, "Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens", *Phoenix*

tional life of the family[109]) to the psychoanalytic (e.g. Rank's theory that because paternity cannot be established with the same certainty as maternity, a child is free to exorcise feelings of hostility towards the father by fantasizing that his male parent is not his real father,[110] whereas since his mother's identity is beyond dispute, hatred towards her is transferred to the stepmother). Smith also suggests that since a woman's rôle as parent is more closely linked than a man's to the value she places upon herself, she is therefore more prone to feelings of low self-esteem, insecurity and guilt, the last of which in particular is often, as has been demonstrated, linked to the development of 'stepmotherly' behaviour.

I have shown how contemporary research into stepfamilies can cast light on the ways in which the negative reputation of the stepmother, as opposed to other stepfamily members, is attributable to circumstances arising within the everyday life of the stepfamily. Although these observations are not all equally applicable to ancient Greece, given the differences between present day western societies and 5th century Athens,[111] in general, however, they have universal relevance. In some areas, indeed, they apply even more in Athens than today: for instance, where a stepmother is created by the death of the first wife (as opposed to divorce), a circumstance more common in the ancient world. Also, more stepmothers in Athens than nowadays would have been engaged in rearing stepchildren full-time:[112] hence there were more opportunities for the problems that we have been discussing to arise. Thirdly, with reference to the stepmother-stepdaughter relationship, it is relevant that in Athens female children had more to do with their stepmothers than male children, since only the latter went to school: this would reinforce the problems inherent in that particularly difficult relationship.

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35 (1981), 329), a widow remarrying would often leave her children with their guardian (e.g. Lys., 32.8., Isae., 7., [Dem.], 40.6), so that contact with their stepfather would have been limited, unless he happened to be the guardian (e.g. Isae., 9.29., Phormio in Dem., 36, 45, 46, discussed above; Harrison (1968) 44, 105: we do not know how often this occurred).

[109] Smith (1990) 18.

[110] His mother must have had a secret lover—a god, or royal personage.

[111] For instance, jealousy is more likely to occur if the wife is in love with her husband, a situation that would not have applied, at least at first, in the case of a young Athenian girl married for the first time to a virtual stranger some years her senior. But love must have developed in many cases, and a woman entering her second marriage might have had more freedom in her choice of partner.

[112] Cf. n. 108 above.

(iii) *Stepfamily 'incest'*

Finally, a word about sexual relationships. In this area, too, modern studies of the stepfamily can offer helpful insights: in particular, they demonstrate that sexual feelings are not confined to stepmothers. It has often been pointed out that a stepmother may be attracted to a stepson, especially if the age difference between them is not great:[113] given that Athenian husbands were usually considerably older than their wives, this phenomenon must have occurred more frequently in Athens than in contemporary Western society. On the other hand, it is equally possible that in such a situation it is the stepson who falls in love with his stepmother. Sociological studies emphasise that the sexually-charged atmosphere in a house where the parents are newly-weds who display an overt sexual interest in each other can seriously affect the children, especially if these are adolescents becoming aware of their own sexuality. In some cases, the son begins to view the stepmother as an object of sexual attention and starts competing with his father for her affection.[114] Alternatively, sexual feelings may surface after a period of time, in the case of a stepson who was a young child at the time of his father's second marriage. As he becomes aware of the opposite sex, these new feelings are directed towards his stepmother, a procedure facilitated by the absence of the incest taboo.[115] The same phenomenon occurs in the case of adolescent girls and stepfathers.[116]

There is, however, a wide gap between experiencing feelings of attraction and putting these into practice. Of actual sexual relationships between the older and the younger generations, those between stepfather and stepdaughter are nowadays the most frequent.[117] They may be initiated by the stepdaughter, who flirts with her stepfather out of jealousy of her mother's sexual relationship with the new spouse—the two women become rivals for the man's affections.

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[113] Maddox (1980) 110, Conolly (1983) 185–8.

[114] Hodder (1985) 122.

[115] Cf. Messer (1969), 214. This could have occurred in 5th century Athens, since (in contrast to Rome) it is not clear that a sexual relationship between stepson and stepmother was regarded by the Athenians of that period as incestuous (see Ghiron-Bistagne (1982), 44).

[116] Messer (1969), 217, points out that sexual feelings can exist on the part of the stepchild of either sex as much as the step-parent.

[117] In contrast to myths, where the stepmother/stepson relationship features. Cf. Collins (1988) 118–123; according to Messer (1969), 213–8, Hodder (1985) 123, stepmother/stepson 'incest' is not entirely unknown, but is rare.

Commonly the stepfather feels sexual attraction towards his stepdaughter, especially if she is a younger and prettier version of his wife. Sometimes such feelings are put into action: in many cases of child sexual abuse the offender is a stepfather.[118] In 5th century Athens, where children after a divorce stayed with their father, stepfathers would have had less frequent access to stepdaughters than they do today; on the other hand, when the remarriage of a widow occurred after the death of her husband, there must have been cases like that of Pasio (discussed above) where the husband in his will appointed the same person as guardian of his children and second husband of his wife. There would have been some Athenian stepfathers, then, who lived in the same household as their stepdaughters.[119]

The point was made earlier that the sexually-charged atmosphere in a household into which a new spouse has been introduced may lead to increased sexual awareness on the part of teenage children, in some cases resulting in a stepson developing a passion for his stepmother. Where both members of a new partnership have children from a previous marriage, the more natural result is for the stepsiblings to be attracted to each other, especially given the absence of the incest taboo which normally stands in the way of such relationships between brother and sister.[120]

The comments of contemporary sociologists on stepfamily 'incest' are useful in emphasising that the stepmother is not the only family member to experience and/or put into practice sexual feelings. They are not, however, concerned with exploring the reasons why stepmothers have a reputation for sexual avidity, because the myth of

[118] Maddox (1980) 172, Collins (1988) 118. Vera Farr, "The Nature and Frequency of Incest", in *Incest and the Community: Australian Perspectives*, ed. P. Hetherington (Perth: 1991) 153, cites a study of 275 cases of sexual abuse, 94 of which involved a father, 52 a stepfather, and 3 a mother (in association with the father or other male relative). The percentage of stepfathers is striking: R. Kosky, in the same book, 176, says that stepfathers are 5 times more likely to abuse stepdaughters than natural fathers. Note that no stepmothers feature in these statistics. Similar findings are reported by J. Hamory, "Child abuse: an overview of recent developments" in *Violence in the Family: a collection of conference papers*, ed. J. A. Scutt (Canberra: 1980) 35.

[119] Given the early age of girls at marriage, they would not have had access to them as long as modern stepfathers. On the other hand, where such relations occurred, the child had no redress (cf. M. Golden, "*Pais*, 'Child' and 'Slave'", *AC* 54 (1985), 101f., Garland (1990) 157–8), so many case of sexual abuse of stepchildren would have gone unnoticed.

[120] Wald (1981) 109, Hodder (1985) 122, Collins (1988) 23. These modern studies say nothing about incestuous relations between half-siblings (which in an Athenian context would mean homometric ones).

the 'wicked stepmother' nowadays involves stepmothers of the malevolent, rather than the amorous, type. This being so, we must look elsewhere for the background to the 'amorous stepmother' stereotype, in particular, to Greek ideas about women, a subject to which I now turn.

2. *Bias against stepmothers as a reflection of general misogynistic attitudes*

The prejudice against the stepmother in the Greek texts may be explained in terms of gender: in other words, it is part of a more general misogynistic tradition which is frequently attested. The recurrence of certain character traits in the depiction of individual stepmothers in the myths was noted earlier: on the whole, these correspond to the qualities regarded by writers such as Aristotle, as quintessentially feminine, notably jealousy, treacherousness (in particular the use of poison), shamelessness, lack of self-control and sexual avarice.[121]

Let us examine these in greater detail. First, jealousy. The notion that women are naturally more prone than men to this emotion, especially jealousy of the sexual variety, is frequently expressed (Eur., *Andr.* 353f., 911f., *Ion* 843–6, *Med.* 263–6., Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.1., Alexis, *PCG* fr. 150.7f. "we men forgive when we are wronged, but women do wrong and then make accusations into the

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[121] Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.1ff. See Dover (1974) 95ff., Lloyd (1983) 94ff. (I take Aristotle Book 9 to be authentic: see Lloyd (1983) 21.) Cf. the distinction between masculine and feminine traits in the anonymous *De Physiognomonia Liber* (4th century AD) §4:

> masculinus animus et vehemens, ad impetum facilis, odii immemor, liberalis, apertus, qui hebetari et circumveniri ingenio atque arte non possit, vincendi per virtutem studiosus, magnanimus. Femininus animus est sollers, ad iracundiam pronus, tenax odii, immisericors atque invidus, laboris impatiens, [in]docilis, subdolus, amarus, praeceps, timidus.

> the masculine mind is vigorous, impulsive, not bearing grudges, generous, open; it cannot be dulled and got around by cleverness and artifice, it is keen to win through bravery, bold. The feminine mind is cunning, prone to anger, harbouring grudges, unpitying and envious, uninured to toil, [un]trainable, sneaky, bitter, rash, timid.

It is noteworthy that the masculine characteristics are all positive, the feminine negative. For a discussion of female stereotypes in ancient texts, see especially Th.Hopfner, *Das Sexualleben der Griechen und Römer* (Prague: 1938) 367ff.

bargain").[122] It underlies the many examples in myth where jealousy is a motivating factor in female behaviour.[123] Here, the important fact about jealousy is not only that it was regarded as a peculiarly female trait but also that it was thought responsible for the direst sort of criminal actions: as Euripides has Medea say,[124] it is the one emotion which turns peace-loving women into murderesses. That women were considered especially susceptible is underscored by a contrast with male behaviour in the myths. I pointed out earlier that stepfathers who kill or persecute a stepchild play only a very minor rôle, and that where they do occur (for example in the story of Cresphontes) their motivation is quite different from that of the stepmothers. As to sexual jealousy, this is rarely displayed by men: there is no equivalent in Greek mythology of Othello.[125] The point is underscored in stories where a man acquires a 'stepchild' through adultery on the part of his wife: in such cases no feelings of hatred are directed towards the product of the relationship.[126] In the myth of Otus and Ephialtes, for example, not only does Aloeus show no jealous hostility towards these stepsons, but he even raises them as

[122] Cf. Dover (1974) 100.

[123] Apart from myths involving stepmothers, jealousy is prominent in the stories of Althaea (cf. ch. 2 n. 16 above) and in the version of the nightingale tale in which Aedon, jealous of the fertility of her sister-in-law Niobe, plots to kill Niobe's son but like Themisto, kills her own son Itylus by mistake (Pherec., *FGrH* 3F124., Apollod., 3.5.5). Cf. also the story that Medea caused the Lemnian women's smell with a drug through jealousy of Hypsipyle (Myrsilus, *FGrH* 477F1a: discussed by S. Jackson, "Myrsilus of Methymna and the Dreadful Smell of the Lemnian Women," *ICS* 15 (1990), 77–83).

[124] Eur., *Med.* 263–6.

[125] A rare exception is a version of the Actaeon myth in which Actaeon's death is attributed to anger on the part of Zeus at his having wooed Semele (Acusilaus, *FGrH* 2 F 33). Other examples are Hellenistic variants of familiar tales and result from a more romantic treatment of love in this period, e.g. Hyacinthus, loved by Apollo, is killed by the jealous Zephyrus who causes a discus to be blown in his direction (first found in Palaephatus Mythologus, 47 (late 4th century BC); in earlier versions, the killing of Hyacinthus is accidental: Roscher s.v. *Hyakinthos*); cf. also a version of the death of Adonis in which the boar that killed him was sent by the jealous Ares (Serv. ad Verg., *Ecl.* 10.18, *Aen.* 5.72: cf. Bömer on Ov., *Met.* 10.710). The Romans did have a 'jealous Moor' stereotype, which might have been the subject of a pantomime on the story of Dido (so E. Fantham, "ΖΗΛΟΤΥΠΙΑ: A Brief Excursion into Sex, Violence, and Literary History", *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 45–57; she discusses the theme of sexual jealousy, especially in Comedy and Mime; the only heterosexual example she finds prior to Menander is Ar., *Plutus* 1014–16).

[126] Anger is directed at the wife: e.g. in Euripides' *Cretans*, Minos is depicted as excessively angry with Pasiphae, even though she is innocent, having been inflicted by Poseidon with a mad passion for a bull as punishment for an offence on the part of Minos against that deity (see Webster (1967) 87–92). Similarly, in Euripides' *Alcmene*,

his own (the relationship is brought out by their name: the Aloadae), despite the fact that they are the product of an adulterous relationship on the part of his wife, who courted the favours of Poseidon with whom she had fallen in love, going to the edge of the sea and gathering his waters in her lap.[127] A noteworthy contrast is seen, in this story, between the behaviour of the twins' stepfather and their stepmother: the stepfather raises them even though they are the fruit of their mother's guilty passion for another, whilst their stepmother Eeriboea betrays them when they attack the god Ares.[128]

Treacherousness was also considered a characteristically feminine emotion. In Hesiod's *Works and Days* (60–8) Pandora is given her deceptive and cunning character by the god Hermes: compare the remark, later in the same poem, that he who believes a woman believes a member of a class who deceives.[129] Plato considered the female sex λαθραιότερον μᾶλλον καὶ ἐπικλοπώτερον ('more secretive and cunning') than men;[130] treacherousness is also one the peculiarly female traits listed by Aristotle. There are numerous passing references in Comedy to this proverbial female quality. In the *Ecclesiazusae*, Aristophanes even puts a statement to this effect in the mouth of a woman: one of Praxagora's arguments in support of the proposition that women are better fitted than men to govern the state is that women when

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Amphitryon, on discovering his wife's affair with Zeus, tried to burn her on the altar (cf. Webster (1967) 92–4; *LIMC* I.1 s.v. Alkmene p. 554, s.v. Amphitryon 736). This picture of a husband taking out his feelings of outrage on his wife stands in contrast with the behaviour of the other offended partner, Hera, whose anger is not directed at her husband but at the innocent offspring, her 'stepson' Heracles. While Amphitryon acts through indignation at his wife's immorality and the insult to his own good name, Hera's reaction is prompted by sexual jealousy.

[127] Apollod., 1.7.4; cf. Hom., *Od.* 11.305ff.

[128] For a discussion of this myth, see Appendix 2. Mention might also be made of Aeneas and his 'stepfather' Vulcan (Hephaestus) in *Aeneid* 8.370ff. Virgil has no compunction in making Venus ask her husband to manufacture armour for Aeneas even though he is the fruit of her affair with Anchises (which was fairly long-lasting since it yielded another son, Lyrus). She backs up her demand by alluding (lines 383f.) to Thetis' request to Hephaestus to make arms for Achilles (cf. Hom., *Iliad* 18) and Eos' similar appeal on behalf of Memnon (mentioned in the cyclic epic *Aethiopis*: see Proclus' summary 14–16 *EGF* p. 47). Neither of these goddesses, however, was married to Hephaestus, and Virgil emphasises the relationship in the case of Venus by also suggesting (line 393) the passage in *Iliad* 14.292ff. where Hera seduces Zeus. Macrobius (1.24.7) reports a critic who was shocked at the impropriety of Venus's pleading on behalf of her son by an adulterous liaison. But the point is that Virgil could not have done so if stepfathers were proverbially hostile to their wife's children by other men.

[129] See West on 60–8.

[130] *Leg.* 781a.

in government won't be cheated because they themselves are cheats.[131] A striking manifestation of treacherousness as a feminine characteristic is the common association of women with poison. In the *Thesmophoriazusae* (430), for instance, the First Woman proposes to kill Euripides, for exposing female vices, either by poison or by some other τέχνη ('artifice'). Numerous women in myth employ poisons and potions, often as a murder weapon (Medea and Deianira for instance).[132] The reputation of women for cunning and treacherousness has much to do with their position in society, the one reinforcing the other. Because they lived relatively secluded lives and (with respect to the use of poison as an implement of murder) because of their comparative lack of physical strength, they were compelled by their circumstances to act cunningly, thus reinforcing the idea that this is a trait inherent in their nature.[133] In the case of stepmothers, there is another good reason why they are shown resorting to such means in order to achieve their murderous designs. If a child who possesses a stepmother is murdered, suspicion will automatically fall on the stepmother; for this reason, a woman in this position must of necessity divert attention from herself by having the deed performed through a third party (thus acting in a less direct, more furtive manner).

In general, women were believed to lack *sophrosyne* ('self-control'), and to be a prey to their emotions.[134] The behaviour of stepmothers can be seen as a conspicuous illustration of the idea. We have already noted how female jealousy (the stepmotherly trait *par excellence*)

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[131] ἄρχουσά τ' οὐκ ἂν ἐξαπατηθείη ποτέ· / αὐταὶ γάρ εἰσιν ἐξαπατᾶν εἰθισμέναι Ar., *Eccl.* 237f.; cf. Aesch., *Ag.* 1636., Eur,. *Andr.* 85 with Stevens (1971) ad loc., citing several other Euripidean passages; Ar., *Lys.* 12., Antiphanes, *PCG* fr.245., Men., fr. 583, 585–6, 591., Plut., *Mor.* 256b.

[132] Cf. Euripides, *TGF*[2] F288, *Andr.* 272, etc. for the association of φάρμακα (along with guile and secret plottings) with women. Just (1989) 265ff. points out the connection between poison and love potions—both are called φάρμακα (cf. Latin *venenum*); accordingly, he sees this as a manifestation not only of women's cunning but of their erotic nature. But the association of women with poison also has a basis in reality: it is a fact even today that although men commit 5 times more crimes than women, the majority of poisoners are female: see John M. Macdonald, *The Murderer and his Victim* (Illinois: 1961) 35.

[133] Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) 53, remarks that Medea has to exercise influence through intrigue because she is a female and so outside the framework of the polis. On the connection between the metaphorical shadiness of women and their literally shadowy environment in the women's quarters of the home, see Carson (1990) 157 n. 45.

[134] Just (1975), 164f. comments that all the characteristics attributed exclusively to women centre on incontinence: "Woman . . . was psychologically incapable of self-control"; cf. Carson (1990), 142f.

is depicted as giving rise to dreadful consequences: a striking manifestation of the fatal inability on the part of women to keep their passions under control. An even more notorious example of female intemperance is sexual lust. Greek attitudes to this have been much discussed by recent writers: the famous story of Teiresias' experiences as both male and female and his conclusion that women enjoy sex nine times as much as men provides a mythical justification for this widespread idea. It underlies passages such as the scene in *Lysistrata* where the wives are persuaded with difficulty to go on strike ("I'd rather walk through fire than do without sex" 133f.); later on (706ff.) they start to defect because they are unable to endure sexual deprivation. In the *Ecclesiazusae*, one of the instances given by Praxagora of women as upholders of conservative values is "they secrete their lovers as of old" (225). And in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, despite their indignation at the remark made by the disguised Mnesilochus that Euripides was right to depict women as prone (among other things) to adultery, the female chorus end their reply with the comment ἀλλ' οὐ γάρ ἐστι τῶν ἀναισχύντων φύσει γυναικῶν / οὐδὲν κάκιον εἰς ἅπαντα πλὴν ἄρ' εἰ γυναῖκες "there is nothing in the world worse than women, shameless by nature,—except women". Although Aristophanes is obviously indulging in hyperbole for comic purposes, as well as attacking Euripides' portrayal of women, much of the humour would be lost if the male members of the audience did not recognise, albeit in exaggerated form, their own preconceptions about the nature of women. Myths of the 'amorous stepmother' type are a notable example of the concept that excessive sexual lust is a characteristically female trait, especially since, as we have seen, there are virtually no stories involving lust on the part of a stepson, nor are there any 'amorous stepfather' stories.

Greek ideas about the sexuality of women must also be placed in the broader context of men's fear of female sexuality as potentially destructive.[135] It was believed that not only were women more susceptible to sexual passion than men, but that when they did succumb, the results would always be disastrous. Because of women's inability to exercise self-control, their enslavement to sexual passion was seen as threatening to the existence of the *oikos*; consequently a need was felt to hold women's sexuality in check by keeping them

[135] On fear of women's sexuality see for example Walcot (1984), 37–47, Golden (1988), 10, D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society* (Cambridge: 1991) 144–6.

either outside the home, as in the case of prostitutes, or else safely restrained within the confines of the household as legitimate wives whose sexual impulses were directed towards the preservation of the *oikos* by the production of lawful heirs.[136] In myths, the dire consequences of female sexuality which is out of control are vividly portrayed.[137] Stepmother myths such as the story of Phaedra offer a fine illustration of this phenomenon. It is significant that in the *Thesmophoriazusae* the main example of female lust as portrayed by Euripides is Phaedra: "How can you defend Euripides?" asks the First Woman. "He writes plays about women like Phaedra and Melanippe but never about Penelope". Mnesilochus replies (549f.): ἐγὼ γὰρ οἶδα ταἴτιον. μίαν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴποις / τῶν νῦν γυναικῶν Πηνελόπην, Φαίδρας δ' ἁπαξαπάσας "and I know the reason: you wouldn't call one woman living today a Penelope, but you'd call the whole lot of them Phaedras" (here Phaedra stands, of course, for adulteresses in general, rather than stepmothers).

In the case of Phaedra there is another possible factor to be taken into consideration. It must be born in mind that the Phaedra story is *not* about a young girl who undergoes marriage with an older man and who immediately falls in love with a coeval stepson. Although Phaedra is closer in age to Hippolytus than to her husband, she is still to be regarded as an older woman, especially in terms of experience (whereas he is sexually uninitiated, she already has two children by Theseus when she meets her stepson for the first time);[138] in other words, the myth centres on a relationship between an adolescent stepson and his older (but still youthful) stepmother. Regardless of whether Phaedra and other 'Potiphar's wife' characters are a projection of Oedipal feelings towards the mother,[139] the portrayal of women

[136] Cf. for example Golden (1988), 6ff., Just (1989) 214ff., Carson (1990) 143ff.

[137] E.g. the adulteresses Clytemnestra and Pasiphae; the children of Iphimedeia are the notorious Aloadae.

[138] In Attic tragedy at any rate, the story is devised in such a way that Phaedra meets her young stepson for the first time after she has been married to Theseus for some years (Hippolytus, an illegitimate son of Theseus born to him before his marriage to Phaedra, was raised apart by his grandfather; according to Asclepiades of Tragilos, (*FGrH* 12 F 28), Theseus on marrying sent his son away because he feared cruel stepmotherly behaviour on the part of his new wife). At the time of their meeting, Hippolytus is still an adolescent, Phaedra has been married to Theseus for some years and has sons by him. We might imagine Hippolytus as in his mid-teens, Phaedra in her twenties and Theseus around 40.

[139] Note that this idea works better in Greek society than in ours: given that girls were married very young to older husbands (at least in Classical Athens), it would

such as Phaedra can at any rate be viewed in the light of attitudes to sexuality in older women. The abuse of old women is a well established erotic and iambic/satiric topos. In this context, however, old age is relative: an 'old' woman is simply one who is older than the man to whom she is attracted.[140] Given a feeling that female sexuality was felt threatening, it would have seemed especially threatening in the case of an older woman, hence the scorn poured on older women who showed signs of interest in sex.[141] In this sense Phaedra, as an 'older woman' in comparison with Hippolytus, is possessed of this especially fearful type of sexuality.[142] The danger is exacerbated in her case by the fact that she is a married woman, since strong feelings of sexual passion were regarded as inappropriate in the case of a wife. In short, Phaedra's position as stepmother, which causes her to transgress both the limits of marriage and the generation boundary, results in her becoming an especially powerful paradigm of the dire consequences of feminine lust.

C. *Conclusion*

I have shown that stepfamily disputes must have been a common feature of Athenian life, but that the reputation of stepmothers for

have been common for mothers of adolescent sons to be still youthful themselves (e.g. a youth of 15 could have a mother of 30 or less, while his father was in his forties): thus the Oedipal fantasy of the son replacing the father as his mother's lover makes sense in terms of social realities. On this concept in relation to stepmothers (the 'Don Carlos' complex), see Otto Rank, *Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage* (Leipzig/Wien: rev. ed. 1926) 44ff., 119ff.

[140] Cf. Carson (1990) 145ff., arguing that a woman's bloom was before her first sexual experience; after this she was overripe. The sexual threat does not apply in the case of women past the menopause because they can no longer produce illegitimate children.

[141] The fact that Athenian wives were normally considerably younger than their husbands may be significant here: the majority of men would have had no sexual experience with older women (and, given the life expectancy, they would not in most cases be still alive by the time their wives reached old age; even those whose wives predeceased them often took young virgins as second wives.

[142] Cf. also the view of Slater (1974), 9–44 (echoing K. Horney, "The Dread of women", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 13 (1932), 348), that every Athenian man experienced insecurity arising from fear of the mother who both disciplined him and made him feel sexually inadequate: hence the creation of mature female bogey figures representing the dark side of the mother. On Phaedra as such a mother figure cf. Slater (1968) 393. For Euripides' Phaedra as demonstrating the dangers to society of female sexuality and reinforcing the need to keep women under control, see most recently Rabinowitz (1993) 155–169.

malevolence, reflected in the myths and elsewhere,[143] demonstrates a bias against stepmothers in contrast to other stepfamily members. This bias arose from: (1) universal psychological phenomena inherent in the stepfamily situation (2) stereotypic and misogynistic perceptions of the female character in general. While the stepmother of Attic tragedy is obviously not a direct mirror of a phenomenon encountered in real-life, the popularity of this subject reflects the social milieu in which the Tragedies were composed.[144] Granted that in contemporary Athens stepmothers were a common phenomenon and that conflicts within stepfamilies were commonly attributed to them, then the figure of the malevolent stepmother who appears on the Tragic stage would strike a chord of recognition among an audience who shared the prejudice, however ill-founded, that stepmothers were intrinsically evil.

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[143] Compare, for instance, how Plato phrases his advice on remarriage (*Leg.* 930b)—that it is to be avoided in order not to impose a stepmother on one's children (see chapter 1 n. 18).

[144] The prominence of stepmother myths as a theme for Tragedies might also be explained in terms of the interest on the part of the tragedians, especially Euripides, in depicting 'wicked women' and the tragic consequences for the family of their behaviour.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *SAEVA NOVERCA* IN ROMAN LITERATURE

A. *The Noverca in the Declamation*

Although the portrayal of individual stepmothers on the Athenian Tragic stage is conditioned by commonly-held presuppositions about stepmothers in general, it is in Roman literature from the late republic onwards that the *saeva noverca* as a stock character becomes prominent. This is seen especially in cases where the stepmother theme is absent in a parallel Greek context: for instance, the characteristics of the *saeva noverca* are superimposed in Latin poetry onto mythological figures such as Juno, who is not explicitly referred to as a stepmother by Greek writers before Plato.[1] The stereotype even influences the writing of history: particularly noteworthy is the way in which Tacitus, in his treatment of Livia, utilises the *noverca* theme to enhance his essentially negative portrait (see chapter 6 for discussion). As has often been pointed out, the popularity of the *saeva noverca* in Roman literature is due to the influence of the declamation, in particular, the *controversia*, where wicked stepmothers, like other stock characters of the genre, occur regularly as nameless representatives of a type.[2] It is appropriate to begin, then, with an examination of the rôle of the stepmother in the declamation.[3]

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[1] Other examples: (1) Medea refers to Creusa as her children's *noverca* in Ov., *Ep.* 12.187f. and Sen., *Med.* 845ff. (see ch 1 p. 7 and n. 26). In Euripides' *Medea*, by contrast, though Creusa's initial reaction to Medea's children is stepmotherly in the sense that she does not at first accept them and needs to be won over by gifts, she is not represented as a μητρυιά (2) In Ovid's description of Iron Age degeneracy (*Met.* 1.144ff), 'terribiles novercae' ('terrible stepmothers') feature (cf. Catullus, 64. 402). Contrast the very similar passage in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (182ff), where there is no mention of stepmothers: as one might expect from this author, Hesiod dwells on the inversion of family and friendship relations between *males* (fathers and sons, brothers etc).

[2] Cf. Bonner (1949) 149ff., for the influence of declamation on Latin literature in general.

[3] On Roman Declamation, see esp. Bornecque (1902), Bonner (1949), M.L. Clarke, *Rhetoric at Rome* (London: 1953) 89–99, George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World 300BC-AD 300* (Princeton: 1972) 312–337, Fairweather (1984) and Lewis A. Sussman, "The Elder Seneca and Declamation Since 1900: A Bibliography" in *ANRW* 32.1 (1984) 557–77.

Stepmothers appear at least 21 times in the extant Roman declamatory collections.[4] In many respects the *noverca* of the declamation is similar to the stepmother of Greek myth; she has, however, three distinguishing features: 1) her anonymity: she is representative of a class rather than an individual character[5] 2) her particular association with poison, one of several methods of privignicide in the myths 3) her motivation: in nearly every case, this has to do with the inheritance question; accordingly the stepchild is always male (stepmothers of the Sidero type are not represented). Amorous stepmothers are only encountered on three occasions.[6] Furthermore, although disputes over inheritance are the main source of stepmotherly malevolence in myth as well as the declamation, in the latter are found three variations on the theme which have a distinctly Roman flavour: a) a stepmother gets her stepchild disinherited rather than murdering him[7] b) sometimes she obtains the inheritance not for her child, but for herself[8] c) occasionally the child on whose behalf she covets the inheritance is female.[9]

The following declamation is a good illustration of the rôle played by the *noverca*, since it touches on most of the themes commonly associated with her by the declaimers. The piece, entitled 'sterilis trium noverca' ('the sterile stepmother of three'), is included among the Minor Declamations ascribed to Quintilian.[10] A stepmother has

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[4] By contrast, I have found only two Greek examples: Lucian's *Abdicatus* and Libanius, *Decl.* 49.

[5] Though this, of course, is typical of all characters commonly encountered in the declamation, e.g. pirates and tyrants.

[6] Sen., *Con.* fr.1., Calp., *Decl.* 22 and Sen., *Con.* 6.7, the topic of which concerns a stepson enamoured of his stepmother; though one *color* is that the son's lovesickness was thought up by the son and stepmother between them in order to deceive the father). Perhaps the 'amorous stepmother' was thought incompatible with the *venefica* ('poisoner') typically found in the declamations, though the theme would have introduced a paradox that should have been welcome to the declamatory style (cf. how Seneca exploits it at *Phaed.* 353ff., mentioned in ch. 1).

[7] [Quint.], *Decl.* 2 (the stepmother tells her husband that her stepson offered her half of the estate if she gave poison to his father. When the son is questioned, he fails to defend himself, and poison is discovered on his person. The father changes his will in favour of the stepmother). In Quint., *Decl.* 338, a stepmother is alleged to have got her stepson disinherited by bribing a poor man to claim him as his own son, exposed as an infant. Cf. also Sen., *Con.* 2.6.3.

[8] [Quint.], *Decl.* 2, cited in previous note. In most of the declamations it is not specified whether the stepmother has children of her own.

[9] E.g. Sen., *Con.* 9.6—a popular topic. For the basis of these themes in Roman law see further discussion in chapter 5.

[10] Quint., *Decl.* 327. For text and commentary on these, see Michael Winterbottom

taken a potion to cause sterility and has been divorced by her husband; she accuses him of *iniustum repudium* ('divorce without just cause'). The speaker, representing the stepmother, begins with a list of *novercalia facta* ('stepmotherly deeds') that the woman might have been expected to have committed—preparing poison for her stepchildren, laying traps for them, influencing her husband's mind against his children. Instead of these crimes, she is accused of something unheard of: that she loves her stepchildren too much ("nihil horum. Novum et inauditum antea crimen: noverca nimium dicitur amare privignos" §3). If her husband did not have children already, excuses for her reluctance to bear children might still be found (fear of the dangers involved, for instance); in this woman's case, however, there are more powerful motives. In her rôle as stepmother, it is argued, she was motivated by thoughts for her own position: (§5) "voluit effugere fabulas novercarum, . . . voluit nihil in domo habere propter quod privignos invideret" ("she wanted to escape the tales told about stepmothers, . . . she wanted to have nothing in the house (i.e. no children of her own) to cause her to feel resentful of her stepsons"). And as a wife, she was concerned for her husband's well being: since he was an elderly man with three sons to be his heirs, he had no need of, nor desire for, further offspring: she was therefore prompted by a desire both to spare an old man the unneccessary burden of a second family and to avoid possible disharmony between half-brothers.

The case for the stepmother relies on bringing out the contrast between her behaviour in reality and that expected of a *noverca*. The fact that she is a good stepmother—something unheard of—emphasises the extent of her altruism and concern for her family. Note the underlying assumption that the rôle of *noverca* involves a standard pattern of behaviour. The *novercalia facta* ('stepmotherly deeds') alluded to encompass the whole range of stepmotherly activities encountered in the declamations: hatred for stepchildren (a loving one is unheard of); treachery ("insidiata est liberis tuis . . . ?" "did she lay snares for your children . . . ?"); poisoning of stepchildren; influencing the husband against his children (presumably a reference to attempts to get the stepson disinherited). It is interesting that the stepmother feels able to avoid being labelled a true *noverca* by refusing to have children: the implication is that stepmotherly malevolence is only triggered when a stepmother has children of her own, whose inherit-

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ed., *The Minor Declamations Ascribed to Quintilian* (Berlin/New York: 1984).

ance prospects are of necessity affected by the presence of stepchildren.[11] The argument is, however, special pleading in this case: its purpose is to justify the taking of the sterility potion by demonstrating that it was done partly with the stepchildrens' welfare in mind. So pervasive is the notion that a stepmother is by definition evil that in other declamations involving a childless stepmother she is represented as desiring to remove the stepchild in order to secure the inheritance for herself.[12] Finally, notice that the stepmother employs a potion to make herself infertile—potions are commonly associated with stepmothers in the declamations. Frequently a *venenum* ('poison') is given to the stepson, at other times, a draught which has dire consequences and is thus tantamount to *venenum*.[13] Despite the connection between potions and witchcraft, however, no stepmother in the declamations is accused of practising the magic arts.[14]

The declamation just discussed is unusual in that the subject of the piece is a good stepmother (one of only two in the extant declamations). This is not to say, however, that wicked stepmothers are normally a given part of the topic: in the majority of declamations, a stepmother's guilt or innocence is left open.[15] The declaimers, however, nearly always side against the stepmother,[16] their arguments depending for their efficacy on the assumption that *novercae* invariably behave in accordance with the stereotype. To take an example,

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[11] Cf. the remark later in the piece (explaining why her husband had no need of further offspring), that the house and will were both full §6)—a clear indication that it is the question of inheritance which underlies stepmotherly hatred.

[12] Note that in Sen., *Con.* 4.6, the son of the first marriage is sent away as soon as a new wife is taken—in other words, stepmotherly activities are feared even before the new wife has a son of her own.

[13] E.g. Quint., *Decl.* 246 and 350, discussed below.

[14] Although the word *venefica* normally means a witch, in declamations it is always applied to stepmothers in the sense 'female poisoner'.

[15] An exception is Calp., *Decl.* 22, in which a stepmother married to an older man falls in love with the stepson, and when her husband, awarded his choice of prize for killing a tyrant, yields this to his wife, she requests marriage to the stepson; the father and son compete to see which of them will argue in court against the marriage. The declamation is spoken by the father: though there are strong hints that the father believes his son is not averse to marrying his stepmother, it is nevertheless the stepmother who is the recipient of the father's abuse: "I confess I was the first in my house to do wrong, when I, an old man, took a wife, though there was already in my house a son and a young man at that. While I put too much trust in sense of duty, I nourished the incestuous eyes of the woman and her unspeakable desires."

[16] Declamations could be spoken on either side, or in some cases, both sides.

the subject of a declamation ascribed to Quintilian[17] is as follows: with war imminent, a stepmother gave a sleeping draught to her stepson, a war hero, which prevented him from taking part in the hostilities and led to his prosecution as a deserter; on being acquitted he prosecuted his stepmother on a charge of *veneficium* ('poisoning'). The declamation takes the side of the stepson, whose argument that the woman is a *venefica* ('poisoner') rests on three premises: 1) the ability to administer a potion so as to stop short of death implies knowledge of *venena* ('poisons') (2) the draught produced such lethargy that death could potentially have resulted (3) the results of the potion were as good as death, if not worse: not only was he deprived of the opportunity to repeat his glorious feats of the past, but had he been found guilty of desertion, he would have suffered disgrace as well as the death penalty. The stepmother's defence, cited by the stepson only in order to refute it, is that she acted out of *pietas*: concerned for her stepson's welfare, she wished to keep him from the dangers of war. His counter-argument—that the disastrous results of the potion were intended by the stepmother—is reinforced by drawing attention to the stereotype of the *noverca* (§5 "potionem istam cui dedisti? . . . privigno dedisti" ("to whom did you give that potion of yours? . . . . you gave it to a stepson"); at §8 he wishes that his *noverca* had poisoned him outright—at least he would have gained public sympathy).[18]

An even more striking example of the tendency to put the blame on the stepmother at all costs is Calp. *Decl.* 35, on the following topic. A wife, repudiated by her husband, and unsuccessful in her repeated attempts to gain a reconciliation with her husband, threatened to take revenge. The husband remarried, giving his son a stepmother. The boy having died from a stomach upset (whether caused by indigestion or poison was unclear), the divorced mother and the stepmother accuse each other of murder. It is not difficult to find

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[17] *Decl.* 246.

[18] A question about the definition of poison also forms the subject of Quint., *Decl.* 350, in which a stepmother has caused the death of her sick stepson by giving him a drink of cold water after the doctors have advised that such a drink would be fatal. Here too, the declamation is spoken against the stepmother, and although most of the speech is concerned with proving the technical point that water administered under these circumstances could be classed as a form of *venenum* ('poison'), there are hints towards the end that the guilt of the accused is more readily believable because she is a *noverca* ("dedisti aegro quod pater non dedisset" "you gave to the sick boy what his father would not have given" §10).

arguments that could be used on behalf of the stepmother to establish the mother's guilt: the threat to avenge her ex-husband's harsh treatment of her, the fact that she had persisted in asking for a reconciliation when it must have been clear that none was forthcoming, perhaps even the suggestion that a mother would prefer to see her son dead rather than in the hands of a stepmother! Yet despite the fact that the mother, in contrast to the stepmother, is given a motivation for the crime, the declaimer sides with the mother; moreover (apart from the rather specious argument that the husband, by not defending his new wife nor accusing his first wife, has proved the stepmother's guilt), he rests his whole case on the reputation of stepmothers and the greater likelihood of a stepmother murdering her stepson than a mother murdering her own child.[19] Even where another person is given a clear motive for committing murder, then, the stepmother is still the prime suspect: she is a *noverca* and so by definition a murderess.

So far I have discussed declamatory topics in which a stepmother is accused of an offence against her stepson. In several instances, the innocence of another person is proved by exploiting the reputation of stepmothers. One example is the declamation (Sen. *Con.* 9.5) where a maternal grandfather who has already lost two grandsons from suspicious alimentary disturbances is accused of *vis* ('violence') after forcibly removing the third from the house of the boy's father and *noverca* (he had not been allowed to visit the first two boys during their illness). The speakers cited by Seneca who took the side of the grandfather defended him, for the most part, by making the obvious suggestion that the stepmother had poisoned the first two children. Only Albucius (§13) used the more original *color* ('turn of argument') that the grandfather removed the boy because he regarded a house where two children had died as unlucky, thus avoiding an accusation against the stepmother. The fact that the grandfather is the father of the deceased first wife was used by Latro (§9) to suggest a situation of conflict between the old man and his son-in-law, the grandfather's actions on the present occasion being inspired by a desire to attack both his son-in-law and the new wife who had replaced his daughter. Apparently this perfectly reasonable line of argument, however, did not have much appeal: the majority of declaimers listed in the

[19] Also, the fact that the child has been poisoned points to the *noverca venefica*.

declamation sided against the stepmother.[20] Clearly, the circumstances of the children's deaths, with the hint of poison, so overwhelmingly suggested the *saeva noverca* theme that to argue for the stepmother's innocence was a task too daunting for most.

A more complex type of case, reminiscent of modern detective stories, concerns the murder not of a stepson but of a husband: the centre of interest is the identity of the murderer. Sen., *Con.* 7.5 is an example. A man with one son has remarried, producing another a son by the second wife;[21] since there is tension between the stepmother and the elder son, the stepson moves next door. Meanwhile there is a rumour of adultery between the new wife and her husband's handsome *procurator* ('steward'). When the husband is found in bed murdered, the circumstantial evidence points to the elder son: the wall adjoining the houses has been dug through and the stepmother is lying wounded beside her husband. On the other hand, the five-year-old son of the couple, who sleeps in the same room, identifies the *procurator* as the murderer. The elder son and the *procurator* accuse each other of the crime. The declaimers cited by Seneca who argue the case on the side of the son make the most of the opportunities offered to attack a stepmother. If the *procurator* is guilty, the stepmother is branded as an adulteress as well as an accomplice to murder. Her bad relationship with her stepson, which is one of the given facts, is further illustrated by the fact that she is trying to set him up as the killer of his father, thus becoming *de facto* the murderess of her stepson, since he would be condemned to death if convicted of parricide. She is also, like a typical stepmother, sneaky and treacherous. Moreover, if the *procurator* is guilty, then the stepmother's wound must be faked. This allows a further opportunity to make play with the hostility between stepmother and stepson: the stepson's innocence is shown by the fact that he is accused of killing his father while only slightly wounding his stepmother—an accusation that rests on an absurdity (i.e. that a son could murder his father but fail to kill his stepmother).[22]

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[20] Even those few who took the father's side (§§9–11) found ways of supporting him without implying the stepmother's innocence, e.g. that the grandfather was turned away from the sick-bed of the two boys not because they were being murdered but because they were too sick for visitors to be permitted.

[21] Cf. on a similar topic [Quint.], *Decl.* 1 and 2.

[22] Other cases could be mentioned, for instance the complicated theme (Sen., *Con.* 7.1) involving two brothers, one convicted of parricide, the other entrusted with

Occasionally the guilt of a *noverca* is an established fact, such as the topic in which a stepmother, convicted of poisoning her stepson, has named her daughter under torture as her accomplice: the daughter is to be executed. Even here, though, the interest centres on whether or not the stepmother is to be held responsible for a second crime, namely making a false accusation against her daughter. The topic was a popular one: Seneca the Elder, in a lengthy treatment, names 22 declaimers who dealt with it, and it appears in two other declamatory collections.[23] It offered a situation ripe with possibilities for exploiting the stereotype of the *saeva noverca*, and the declaimers cited by Seneca were quick to seize every opportunity. Arguments are recorded on both sides. Those who pursued the cause of the father, representing the daughter, presented two lines of defence. The first was concerned with vindicating the good character of the girl herself,[24] the second with explaining why the stepmother had falsely accused her own daughter of a crime that would result, if she were convicted, in the girl's execution. In particular, much was made of the idea that the *noverca* was acting as a stepmother, rather than a mother, towards her own daughter (e.g. "nefaria mulier, filiae quoque noverca, ne mori quidem potuit nisi ut occideret" ("an abominable woman, a stepmother even to her daughter, she could not even die without killing") §1, cf. §§3, 4, 5, 7, 17, 19). Although the stepmother is guilty of poisoning her stepson in either case, (i.e. whether or not her daughter was an accomplice), it is obvious that if the daughter is innocent, then her mother appears as even more stepmotherly, since her daughter's innocence would involve not only a false accusation on her part (i.e. a typical act of stepmotherly treachery), but also an attempt to kill her daughter.[25] It is not surprising then, that most of

carrying out the execution; when the latter fails to do the job properly and the former turns up as a pirate chief and captures his father, the second brother is blamed by his father and disinherited. In this case, the brothers happen to have a stepmother, who seems to have been responsible for the original accusation of parricide: declaimers were divided in their opinion as to whether the stepmother should be accused of making a false accusation as a *color* on the side of the disinherited son.

[23] Sen., *Con.* 9.6; cf. Quint., *Decl.* 381., Calp., *Decl.* 12. For a comparison of the different versions, cf. Bornecque (1902) 30–1.

[24] (i) she is too young to have commited a crime (§§5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13) (ii) the fact that the girl wept for her brother testifies to her love for him (§§ 1, 8, 18) (iii) the contrast between her reaction to her brother's death and the torturing of her mother, at which she failed to weep, shows whose side she is taking (§§ 8, 17).

[25] Since the daughter's conviction for being an accomplice would involve the death penalty.

the arguments offered by Seneca were spoken on the side of the daughter, and depend to a large extent on the reputation of stepmothers. In fact, of 22 speakers cited by Seneca, only two are represented as taking the side of the state against the daughter, and both of these speakers also spoke on the other side as well. Although most declaimers argued in defence of the daughter, two arguments on the side of the prosecution are reported by Seneca: (1) Triarius countered the plea that the girl was too young to commit a murder by pointing to the fact that a stepmother bore her, a circumstance which encourages belief that the girl could be wicked from birth[26] (2) the *color* was employed by Silo that in poisoning her stepson the stepmother's motive was to secure the sole inheritance for her daughter: the daughter was both her accomplice in, and her motive for, the crime. Notice that even when supporting the stepdaughter's complicity in the murder, which would absolve the stepmother from the crime of unjustly accusing her daughter, the stepmother is still depicted in an unfavourable light, the arguments offered being dependent on the malevolence of *novercae*.[27]

Finally, a rare case (Quint., *Decl.* 373) in which a stepmother who is technically guilty of a crime is defended. A man with one son buries his wife, placing her ornaments with her in the tomb; he then remarries. Later he is captured by pirates, and when his son hesitates to supply the ransom requested by his father, the stepmother digs up the first wife's ornaments and sends them. She is then prosecuted (successfully) by the stepson for tomb desecration; on returning home, the father disinherits his son. The declamation is spoken by the father, who takes the side of his wife. She acted rightly, he argues, even calling her 'optima feminarum' ('the best of women'). The wife's loyalty to her husband is contrasted with the son's failure to secure his father's ransom, an action which is represented by the father as tantamount to parricide. On a psychological level, the stepson's reaction to the desecration of his mother's tomb is indicative of resentment on his part towards the new stepmother because of incomplete grieving for the mother. The father, however, evinces no understanding of his son's feelings: '"sepulcrum' inquit 'violaverat'.

[26] §9: against this, Latro argued that even the stepmother when young was neither a *noverca* nor a murderess (§6), an argument based on the common assumption that murderous behaviour is not innate, but arises from being a *noverca*.

[27] She could have been depicted less unfavourably, e.g. it could have been said that she was a stepmother to her stepson but not to her daughter.

Quid ad te? Mea iniuria est; ego vindicabo" ("He says 'she had desecrated the tomb.' What is that to you? The wrong is mine; it is I who will avenge it"). This unfavourable presentation of the stepson is highly unusual: elsewhere, feelings of resentment towards a stepmother on the part of a stepson, if admitted, are viewed sympathetically. For instance, in the cases previously discussed where the identity of the father's murderer is the point at issue, the underlying implication behind the *color* that a stepson would not have killed his father while failing to kill his stepmother, is that the killing of a stepmother by a stepson is not a serious crime, rather, it arises from the stepson's natural desire to take revenge for past injuries[28]

The piece is noteworthy in being the only example among the declamations where events are viewed from the stepmother's perspective. This need not have been so: had the stepson's side been argued, a reasonable case could have been made on his behalf. The view might have been taken that the second wife, in desecrating another woman's tomb, was not thinking of her husband's interests but rather availing herself of the opportunity to express her resentment against the the first wife (why did she not use her own jewelry for the ransom?); moreover, she behaved in a manner which must inevitably cause offence to her stepson. Some reason for the stepson's failure to assist his father might have been devised (e.g. that he needed more time to raise the money: the topic says only that the stepson delayed, not that he refused) and in general, the arguments might have been reinforced by allusion to the reputation of stepmothers. It is significant that in this one case where a stepmother's innocence is argued, and where the stereotype of the stepmother is not utilised, the emphasis is on the woman's wifely rôle (for this reason, she is referred to by the husband as *uxor* ('wife') rather than *noverca*).[29] She is presented not as a good stepmother but as a good wife who is also

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[28] Cf. Sen., *Con.* 4.5, where a doctor stepson defends himself against the charge of having refused to treat his ailing stepmother on the grounds that if anything went wrong he would be accused of murdering her. Seneca comments that it would be unwise tactics when defending the stepson's case to make him appear hostile to his stepmother: he can get away with making excuses for his actions but not with appearing to be taking revenge. In other words, if the stepson gives evidence of hostility to his stepmother, then his refusal to treat her will be open to the interpretation that he was prompted by a desire to avenge himself for the mistreatment he has suffered at her hands.

[29] §2 (father to son) "quam accusas? Uxorem meam" "whom are you prosecuting? My wife" (rather than 'novercam tuam' 'your stepmother').

a stepmother. She is, in fact, virtuous only from the viewpoint of her husband, whose welfare provides the sole motivation for her actions. As a wife, she displays *pietas*, as a stepmother, however, she failed to show consideration for the sensitivities of her stepson.

To summarise, in declamations involving stepmothers, the guilt of the stepmother is not usually included in the given topic. It was, however, extremely uncommon to take the part of the stepmother. Although Seneca frequently records the arguments that were presented on both sides of a case, in *controversiae* involving stepmothers, arguments in the stepmother's favour are rarely given. In the other extant declamatory collections, the speaker virtually always sides against the stepmother.[30] Often, the odds are stacked against the stepmother, for instance in [Quint.], *Decl.* 2, where the husband is found murdered after changing his will in his second wife's favour, and the stepson, also suspected of the crime, is blind. On the other hand, even where another person is given a motive for a crime (for instance, in [Quint.], *Decl.* 1 where the circumstantial evidence points to the stepson, and it is he who is the heir), the declamation is still presented on the side of the stepson rather than the stepmother. Undoubtedly the malevolence of the stepmother as a stock figure, like a tyrant or a pirate, was so firmly established that even the most ingenious declaimer taking the stepmother's side might find it well nigh impossible to prove his case.

B. *The* Saeva Noverca *of Declamation Transferred to Literary Texts*

1. *General allusions to novercae*

In chapter 1, mention was made of the frequent allusions in Latin poetry to the reputation of *saevae novercae*. Underlying these passages is the stepmother of the declamations. The earliest examples are *Georgics* 2.128 ("pocula si quando saevae infecere novercae" "if ever cruel stepmothers have imbued the cups with poison")[31] and the allusion to stepmothers as murderesses in Horace's 5th *Epode* ("quid ut

[30] Except for the last case discussed and Quint., *Decl.* 327; in these collections, though one speech per topic is the norm, a speech is often given on the other side: this never happens in the case of those involving a stepmother.

[31] At *Georg.* 3.282f. ("hippomanes, quod saepe malae legere novercae/ miscueruntque herbas et non innoxia verba" "hippomanes, which malevolent stepmothers often collect, and they mix in herbs and not unharmful spells"), Virgil

noverca me intueris?" "why are you looking at me like a stepmother?"), dating from round the same period[32]. Although the more extravagant and unreal features of the declamation (of which *saevae novercae* are an example) are usually associated with its development under the early empire,[33] I would argue that the stepmother already had a place in declamation in the 30's, and that both Virgil and Horace became acquainted with the theme through attendance at declamatory peformances. Asinius Pollio, the great friend of both poets, was an enthusiastic declaimer: Seneca says that he heard him declaim both in his prime and as an old man.[34] Given that Pollio was consul (at the age of 37) in 40 and devoted himself to more literary pursuits after his retirement from public life, and that Seneca came to Rome after the death of Cicero,[35] Seneca must have heard Pollio declaim 'in his prime' during the 30's. Moreover, we know that Pollio declaimed on at least two themes involving a stepmother (*Con.* 4.5 (the doctor stepson) and *Con.* 7.1.22—Pollio was one of the declaimers who inveighed against the stepmother in this case). It is quite possible, then, that Virgil and/or Horace were present on one or more of the occasions when Pollio declaimed to a group of friends and that the subject was one of those involving a stepmother.[36]

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appears to be referring to the use of love magic: this is not a declamatory theme and may be a piece of folklore.

[32] Note also the *iniusta noverca* ('harsh stepmother') in *Ecl.* 3 (discussed below) which goes back to the 40's.

[33] Despite Seneca's claim that declamation in its Roman form was introduced during his own lifetime (he was born c.55 B.C. and studied at Marullus' school in the 30's), it is generally agreed that the rhetorical education introduced into Rome from Greece which came into vogue in the earlier part of the first century BC was not substantially different from that later described by Quintilian (cf. Fairweather (1981) 119f., Sussman (1978) 8-10). On the other hand, there were some developments, including a propensity to extravagance and distancing from real life. Bonner (1949) 25, cites Quintilian's *novercae saeviores tragicis* ('stepmothers more cruel than in Tragedy') as an example of the extravagances typical of that period. The view is based on the fact that the rhetorical exercises mentioned in early works such as the *Ad Herennium* show no traces of such features.

[34] For Pollio as a declaimer, see J. André, *La Vie et l'Oeuvre d'Asinius Pollion* (Paris: 1949) 75-79.

[35] Sen., *Con.* 1.pr.11.

[36] It cannot be proved for certain that the stepmother theme had been introduced as early as the 30's, since all the declaimers mentioned by Seneca as speaking on such topics, including Pollio, may have spoken on them at a later date: there is no evidence that any of these declaimers were not still alive after 30 BC. Nonetheless at least two of them (Hybreas and Nicetes) flourished, according to Jerome, around 33BC (cf. Bornecque (1967) 172, 181).

Apart from the passages in Virgil and Horace just discussed, the influence of the declamation also underlies the many general references in Latin literature to murderous stepmothers as a stock character type. Reference was made in a previous chapter, for example, to *Odes* 3.24, where the Utopian lifestyle of the Getae and Scythians is characterised by the absence of stepmothers ("illic matre carentibus/ privignis mulier temperat innocens" "among those tribes a woman, innocent of crime, treats with restraint her stepsons who lack a mother"). Horace's choice of vocabulary is interesting: first, the stepmother is alluded to simply as *mulier* ('woman'), the steprelationship being designated by the reference to her *privigni* ('stepsons'). Perhaps this is a deliberate attempt to avoid the evil associations of the term *noverca* , which would be inappropriate in this context.[37] Second, the use of *tempero.* A translation such as 'is kind to'[38] fails to do justice to the connotations of the verb, which basically means to exercise restraint or self-control. The suggestion is that the stepmother's treatment of her stepchildren involves an effort on her part to avoid giving way to the feelings of hostility which she might, according to the stereotype, be expected to feel towards her stepchildren.

Just as Horace associates the absence of stepmotherly malevolence with races who display features of the Golden Age, so for Ovid the presence of wicked stepmothers exemplifies the immorality of the Iron Age. In a catalogue of personal relationships, the subversion of which is associated with the arrival of the Iron Age (*Met.* 1.144ff.), stepmothers are conspicuous as an especially dread example. The description of the stepmothers: "lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae" "terrible stepmothers mix deadly aconite" (147) stands in vivid contrast to what is said about other relationships (e.g. "non hospes ab hospite tutus" ("guest is not safe from host"), "fratrum . . . gratia rara est" ("affection between brothers is rare"), "filius ante diem patrios inquirit in annos" ("the son inquires into his father's life-expectancy prematurely").[39] Even the most explicit of the other examples

[37] Though Horace is not averse to the use of oxymoron elsewhere (Robin G.M. Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* (Oxford: 1970) comment on 7 cases in *Odes* 1, for instance).

[38] Gordon Williams, *The Third Book of Horace's Odes*, (Oxford:1969) ad loc.; cf. the OLD definition of *tempero* 'be moderate in one's actions towards', citing this passage.

[39] Although the reference, at the end of the passage, to Astraea leaving the bloodsoaked earth (149f.) makes it clear that Ovid is throughout the list concerned with murder, only in the case of stepmothers is this stated specifically, rather than merely hinted at.

—"imminet exitio vir coniugis, illa mariti" ("the husband longs for the destruction of his wife, the wife of her husband") is mild by comparison. Secondly, in nearly every case except the reference to stepmothers, the singular is used ('hospes/ vir/ coniugis, filius' etc); the reference to *novercae* in the plural, by contrast, suggests the idea of stepmothers as a stock character type. Finally, note the position of stepmothers in the list: there is a progression from less important to more important relationships, ranging from guest and host, through in-laws to the nuclear family-brothers, husband and wife and finally parents and children, represented by two examples: stepmothers who poison their stepsons, and sons who seek the death of their fathers. The *novercae*, then, stand for the killing of child by parent. As elsewhere, the evil stepmother is a convenient scapegoat for the negative mother (in this case parent) figure.[40]

2. *Stepmothers as characters*

As well as the numerous passing references to the malevolent reputation of *novercae*,[41] stepmothers also feature as characters in their own right. A brief allusion to a cruel stepmother occurs in Virgil's Third *Eclogue*: Menalcas, when asked by Damoetas what animal from his herds he will put up as a pledge in a musical competition, replies that he will offer cups instead; he dare not risk losing an animal, since he has a father and an *iniusta noverca* ('harsh stepmother'), who count the animals twice a day (33f.). The passage demonstrates the Roman propensity for introducing the stepmother at any opportunity: this is underscored by the fact that in the Theocritean passage on which it is closely modelled (*Id* 8.15–16), it is a harsh mother, rather than a stepmother, who counts the flock along with the father. Note too that although Virgil's stepmother is an individual character, she is also representative of a general type.

Two stepmothers make their appearance in the Roman novel. A tale in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.2–12 is of special interest because it combines the themes of the amorous stepmother and the woman

[40] There is also, of course, the fact that stepmothers have greater motivation than the natural parents for killing a child. For this reason, too, patricide is chosen as an example rather than matricide: a father was more likely than a mother to leave an inheritance that was worth killing for.

[41] Apart from those discussed above, I have made mention of many others; see chapter 1.

who administers poison to her stepson. In this story, the *noverca*, angry at her stepson's rejection of her amorous proposals, has a slave procure for him a cup of poison; her own son drinks it by mistake, and the usual false accusation of attempted seduction is now given a novel slant in being allied to an accusation of murder (she claims that the stepson killed her own son in revenge when she rejected his advances and then threatened her own life as well). Unlike many 'amorous stepmother' tales in myth, this one has a happy ending: when the matter goes to court, it is finally revealed by the doctor from whom the slave bought the poison that, in an attempt to stop foul play, he had handed over a sleeping-draught. The supposedly dead son is found to be to be alive in his coffin, the stepmother and her slave are punished, and the father who thought he had lost his sons has both of them restored to him.

Apuleius' characterisation of the stepmother as a villain is consistent throughout the narration. The tale is introduced as a "scelestum ac nefarium facinus" ("wicked and abominable crime"), the *noverca* (ch. 2) as "forma magis quam moribus in domo mariti praepollens" ("predominant in her husband's house more by virtue of her beauty than her morals"). By contrast, the stepson, who appears in the story before the introduction of his father's second wife, is specified at the outset as outstanding in *pietas* and *modestia* ('modesty'); he remains completely innocent throughout the narration. Like the Phaedra of Tragedy, whose love is usually presented in terms of an illness, the stepmother appears ill, but in her case this is mere pretence; moreover, she cunningly exploits the similarity between the symptoms of love and physical sickness to hide what is really the matter with her. She also takes advantage of her stepson's *pietas* when he comes to visit her on her sickbed, suggesting that he cure her by jumping into bed with her immediately; she excuses her brazenness (ch. 3) with the sententious "quod nemo novit, paene non fit" ("what no one knows about, virtually doesn't happen"). Throughout the rest of the narration, every opportunity is taken to comment on the wickedness of this *noverca*, e.g. horrified at his stepmother's advances, the boy "statim . . . se refert a noxio conspectu novercae" ("immediately . . . hurries away from the baleful sight of his stepmother" ch. 4), "mobilitate lubrica nefarium amorem ad longe deterius transtulisset odium" ("with shifty fickleness transformed her wicked love into a hatred far worse" ch. 4: referring to her decision to poison him), "dira illa femina et malitiae novercalis exemplar unicum" ("that dread-

ful woman, a singular example of stepmotherly malevolence" ch. 5) and so on. When her own son is killed by mistake she is made to show no remorse, but busies herself working out a false accusation to save her skin. Finally, when the truth is revealed, her fate—exile for life—is a fitting conclusion to the episode.[42]

Although the tale is ostensibly based on the Phaedra myth as it appears in Tragedy,[43] in many ways this stepmother resembles the stock character of the declamation, especially in her use of poison, as well as her anonymity. The story, however, also contains clear folktale elements:[44] the ruse of pretending to be sick in order to entice her stepson into her bed[45] (in Tragedy, by contrast, Phaedra really is sick); the killing of the stepmother's own son by mistake[46] and the fact that she displays no remorse when her own son is killed;[47] the revival of the supposedly dead son by a trick involving deception and substitution;[48] the restoration of *both* sons to the father and the happy ending.

A second wicked woman in Apuleius' novel who is also a *noverca*, is the baker's wife in Book 9.14ff, whose character is delineated in vivid terms: she is described as "saeva scaeva, virosa ebriosa, pervicax pertinax, in rapinis turpibus avara, in sumptibus foedis profusa, inimica fidei, hostis pudicitiae" ("savage and perverse, mad on men and booze,

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[42] Another novelistic account of an amorous and wicked stepmother occurs in the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, discussed below n. 106. There is also a 'Potiphar's wife' story in Xenophon of Ephesus' novel the *Ephesiaca* (2.3–6) involving the attempted seduction and false accusation of the hero Habrocomes by his master's daughter Manto.

[43] Cf. ch. 2 "iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam, legere et a socco ad cothurnum ascendere" "so now dear reader, know that you are reading a Tragedy, not a Comedy, and are ascending from the slipper to the buskin" (a reference to the footwear worn by Comic and Tragic actors respectively). A mock Tragic tone is effected through verbal reminiscences of Seneca's *Phaedra*: cf. E. Paratore *La Novella in Apuleio* (Palermo: 2nd ed., 1942) 216–7. Zwierlein (1987) 65–6, uses Apuleius to support his contention that Phaedra tried to poison Hippolytus in a Tragedy, i.e. the *Phaedra* of Sophocles.

[44] On the influence of folklore in Apuleius see Scobie (1983) 21–30.

[45] For feigning sickness as a folktale motif: Dundes (1983) 189.

[46] See Thompson (1957) K 211.1.

[47] For this as a folktale feature, see Appendix 3 p.[265f.].

[48] The motif is closely paralleled in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, where a folktale-like stepmother (who is unnamed) gets a doctor to prepare poison, supposedly to kill rats, and he substitutes a sleeping draught, distrusting her motives; the stepdaughter for whom the poison was intended is thus saved, and the wicked stepmother, seeing her plot foiled, dies.

headstrong and stubborn, greedy in her shameful plundering, prodigal in her repulsive extravagances, inimical to fidelity, an enemy to chastity" ch. 14) Her malicious nature is directed firstly towards the ass (i.e. Lucius) which she subjects to cruel treatment. When her husband comes home unexpectedly, she hides her latest lover in a flour bin; his fingers stick out, the ass gets his revenge by kicking the fingers and causing the young man to utter a cry; the husband punishes the lover and divorces the wife (ch. 23–8). She now consults a witch with the purpose of either getting her husband reconciled or else, if that proves impossible, of killing him. The witch, unable to move the husband by her magic, sends to him the ghost of a woman who has died violently (ch. 29). The ghost leads him into a room; when he fails to emerge after some lapse of time, the servants force open the door; they find the woman gone and the husband hanging dead from a rafter (ch. 30). Only at this point in the tale do we learn that the wife is also a stepmother: the husband's recently married daughter, having been informed by her father's ghost of what had taken place (described as the 'novercae scelus' ('crime of her stepmother'), arrives the next day, and being heiress, sells all the household goods, including the ass (ch. 31). At this point the episode ends. It is primarily a story of an adulterous wife, not a stepmother. The steprelationship is mentioned only at the end of the story; the reason for the stepdaughter's appearance is simply to explain how the ass came to pass into new ownership; the young woman has not been deprived of her inheritance by her stepmother and since she is not living at home, there is no opportunity for the stepmother to be described as mistreating her. Nevertheless, it seems quite appropriate that this woman who has been characterised as "pessima et ante cunctas mulieres longe deterrima" ("the worst and by far the most wicked woman in all the world") should also happen to be a *noverca*.

3. *Stepmothers in Myth*

The treatment by Latin poets of well-known mythological topics involving stepmotherly behaviour is a striking illustration of the influence of the declamation, for characters such as Phaedra and Juno are portrayed as stereotypic *saevae novercae* in a way that differs radically from the Greek texts in which they appear.

(i) *Phaedra*

Although Phaedra was for the Greeks the 'amorous stepmother' *par excellence*, a character who, in her basic manifestation, may be regarded as a wicked stepmother of a special kind, in Euripides' second *Hippolytus*, however, Phaedra is accorded a degree of sympathy that makes it hard to view her in an unfavourable light. It is largely because of this amelioration of Phaedra's character, I suggest, that the stepmother theme is virtually non-existent in the play.[49] In Latin poetry, by contrast, Phaedra becomes for the most part another conspicuous instance of the *saeva noverca*.

Mention has already been made of a tradition, alluded to by Propertius, in which Phaedra employed erotic magic: the connection with potions allies her closely with the *noverca venefica*.[50] In a fleeting reference to the Phaedra story in *Aeneid* 7, Hippolytus is described as having perished 'arte novercae' ('through the guile of his stepmother'), a remark which conjures up an image of the typical stepmother plotting against her stepson. The context is the story of the transformation of Hippolytus, restored to life, into the Italian god Virbius.[51] The same tale finds a place in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.499ff., where Phaedra's part in the legend is dealt with at slightly greater length and her wickedness made even more explicit. Hippolytus is here said to have died "credulitate patris, sceleratae et fraude novercae" ("through the credulity of his father and the treachery of his sinful stepmother"). Phaedra, described as Pasiphaeïa (daughter of Pasiphae)[52] is represented as having attempted to seduce Hippolytus in person and then to have made her false accusation: "me Pasiphaeïa quondam/ temptatum frustra patrium temerare cubile, quod voluit, finxit voluisse" ("the daughter of Pasiphae, after she had tried unsuccessfully to get me to pollute my father's bed, claimed falsely that it was I who wanted to do what she in fact wanted"). No mention is made

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[49] Also, the fact that a sexual relationship between stepson and stepmother was not incestuous, meant that the emphasis was on her position as married woman/ potential adulteress. For a discussion of the question of when Phaedra became regarded as primarily a stepmother, see excursus to Appendix 2.

[50] Prop., 2.1.51f., discussed in excursus to Appendix 2.

[51] Phaedra also appears in the underworld as one of those who have perished for love (*Aen.* 6.445). The fact that she is named without further comment, in contrast to other heroines such as Eriphyle, suggests that she is regarded by Virgil as too much a 'saeva noverca' to warrant a show of sympathy.

[52] The name was probably chosen deliberately in order to recall Pasiphae's unnatural passion for the bull.

of the involvement of a third party—the nurse who features in Tragedies on the theme: this is not merely for purposes of economy, but to emphasise Phaedra's guilt: note the use of *temerare* ('to pollute'), a term with a strongly moral flavouring. Ovid offers two possible motives for Phaedra's accusation, both dishonourable: either she feared that Hippolytus would give her away, or she felt aggrieved at his refusal of her advances ("indiciine metu magis offensane repulsae?").

This negative portrayal of Phaedra is found also in Ovid's *Heroides* 4. The poem takes the form of a *suasoria* in which Phaedra presents her viewpoint to Hippolytus, but without any signs of serious emotional conflict on her part. Although Pudor (Modesty) prevents her from speaking directly to Hippolytus, Amor (Love) persuades her to put her case to him in a letter in which she marshals every possible argument to allay her guilt: it is not *nequitia* ('wickedness') on her part but Amor that prompts her to become an adulteress; this is, in fact, a new rôle for her; in any case her husband has wronged her in several ways. The poem is essentially parodic, and when Phaedra finally alludes to herself as *noverca,* it is to make the naughty suggestion that *pietas* in the stepmother/ stepson relationship was old-fashioned even in Saturn's reign ("ista vetus pietas, aevo moritura futura/, rustica Saturno regna tenente fuit") and that incestuous sexual relationships can be justified with reference to the marriage of Jupiter and Juno. Moreover, any embraces witnessed between them will merely be taken as evidence that she is a *fida noverca* ('dutiful stepmother') to her stepson. It is hard to take this stepmother seriously.[53] The Epistle is *sui generis*; nevertheless it exerted an important influence on Seneca, especially with regard to the emphasis on Phaedra as victim of Amor.

In the *Phaedra,* Seneca follows his Latin predecessors to the extent that he makes Phaeda both approach Hippolytus, and make her false accusation to Theseus, in person.[54] Yet Phaedra is by no means portrayed as a typical *saeva noverca* in this play. She is reluctant to confess her passion to Hippolytus and the false accusation, represented as the nurse's idea, is dragged out of Phaedra only by Theseus' persistent questioning and his threat to torture her servant.

[53] On the poem see Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides,* (Princeton: 1974) 142ff.

[54] By contrast, as we saw, in Euripides' *Hippolytus,* it is the nurse who approaches Hippolytus against Phaedra's wishes and she suicides *before* the truth comes out, leaving a note for Theseus on her body; both things ameliorate her guilt (see Appendix 1).

Moreover, the unfavourable portraits of the philandering Theseus and of Hippolytus himself, whose aversion to women and sex is pathological in its intensity, serve to evoke a large degree of sympathy for Phaedra.[55]

Not unexpectedly,[56] however, the declamatory theme of the *saeva noverca* is exploited to some extent in the play. In contrast to Euripides' second *Hippolytus*, where Phaedra is never described as the stepmother of Hippolytus, in Seneca's drama the term *noverca* is used on several occasions. One reason for this—aside from the influence of the declamation—is that any sexual alliance between stepmother and stepson was technically incestuous in Rome;[57] accordingly, Seneca stresses that the love of Phaedra for Hippolytus is not only immoral but against the laws of nature.[58] In several places throughout the drama, Seneca avails himself of the opportunity offered by his theme to exploit conventional ideas about wicked stepmothers. Reference was made in an earlier chapter to the paradox enunciated by the Chorus that Love is so powerful even *saevae novercae* succumb to it (line 356f.). A similar rhetorical effect is achieved later (638) when Phaedra herself, about to reveal her feelings to Hippolytus, replies to the latter's question "Quodnam istum malum est?" ("what is that ill of yours?"), "quod in novercam cadere vix credas malum" ("an ill which you would scarcely believe could happen to a stepmother").

Seneca also alludes to the reputation of stepmothers in order to create an ironic effect. Hippolytus' lengthy speech (commencing at line 483) in which he voices his preference for an innocent lifestyle, free from sexual involvement with women, culminates in a list of

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[55] For a discussion, along the above lines, of the characterisation of Phaedra, see especially A.J. Boyle, "In Nature's Bonds: A Study of Seneca's 'Phaedra'", *ANRW* 2.2 (1985) 1284–1347, also P. J. Davis, "Vindicat omnes natura sibi: A reading of Seneca's Phaedra", *Ramus* 12 (1983), 114–27.

[56] In view of the influence of rhetoric on Senecan Tragedy, inherited from his father, the author of the *Suasoriae* and *Controversiae*. See, for example, C.D.N. Costa, "The Tragedies" in *Seneca*, ed. C.D.N. Costa (London 1974) 99ff., Pratt (1983) 135ff.

[57] See further in chapter 5.

[58] Phaedra's passion is several times compared with that of her mother, Pasiphae, for the bull; the nurse makes explicit the unnaturalness of Phaedra's passion at 165ff.:

> compesce amoris impii flammas, precor,
> nefasque quod non ulla tellus barbara
> commisit umquam, non vagi campis Getae
> nec inhospitalis Taurus aut sparsus Scythes;
> expelle facinus mente castifica horridum

crimes associated with the degeneration of humanity following the end of the Golden Age. The last of these, the killing of their own offspring by *impiae matres* ('impious mothers'), is followed by an allusion to stepmothers—"taceo novercas: mitius nil est feris" ("I won't mention stepmothers—they are no less gentle than wild animals" (558). Ultimately, says Hippolytus by way of conclusion, man's woes can be traced to the wickedness of women: he offers Medea as the most notorious example (563f.). The choice of Medea is doubly apt, both as an exemplification of the *impiae matres* who kill their children, and also as a notable murderous *noverca*.[59] At this point in the play, Hippolytus is unaware of Phaedra's passion for him, and his statement about stepmothers is merely part of a tirade against women in general, the theme of the murderous stepmother being an appropriate symbol of the loss of Golden Age innocence.[60] In view, however, of Phaedra's revelation of her love for him, soon to follow, his choice of *exemplum* is deeply ironic.[61]

The stereotype of the stepmother is also invoked to underline Hippolytus' abhorrence of Phaedra's actions. After Phaedra has re-

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memorque matris metue concubitus novos.
miscere thalamos patris et nati apparas
uteroque prolem capere confusam impio?
perge et nefandis verte naturam ignibus...

check the flames of an impious love, I beg you,
and a sin which no barbarian land
has ever committed, not the nomadic Getae
nor the inhospitable Taurus not the scattered Scythians;
drive out this terrible deed from your chaste mind
and remembering your mother be afraid of novel sexual unions.
are you preparing to mingle the beds of a father and a son
and to conceive in your impious womb a mongrel offspring?
go on with it and transform nature with your sinful passion...

There is nothing to compare with the vehemence of this condemnation in Euripides.

[59] This connection is brought out by her being described as wife of Aegeus, an appellation which brings to mind the crime in which her rôle was that of stepmother: her attempted murder of Theseus.

[60] Cf. Catull., 64, 401f., Ov., *Met* 1.147, and Sen., *De ira* 2.8.9ff.

[61] Contrast Eur., *Hipp.* 616ff. where the protagonist's denunciation of women, made after he is aware of Phaedra's feelings, involves condemnation of Phaedra as an example of a clever women but not a stepmother. Note also the reference to the *stupra* ('sexual transgressions') of unchaste women shortly following the reference to stepmothers (559ff. "dux malorum femina... / ... huius incestae stupris/fumant tot urbes..." "woman is the chief source of ills... /... through the sexual transgressions of this unchaste creature so many cities burn")—again unconsciously ironical, as Hippolytus is referring to women in general.

vealed her passion to Hippolytus he ironically suggests that he deserves to die, since he has pleased a stepmother ('placui noverca' 684); by alleging Phaedra to be even worse than the Colchian *noverca*, Medea, he recalls his earlier denunciation of stepmothers.[62] Only once[63] does Phaedra refer to herself as *noverca*, and here the use of the term seems appropriate: about to confess the truth to Theseus, she addresses him as "funesta pater / peior noverca" ("father worse than a death-dealing stepmother" 1191–2), thus emphasising the enormity both of her own guilt and also that of Theseus in murdering his innocent son.

In sum, although Seneca in the *Phaedra* makes frequent use of the stereotype of the *noverca*, he does so for rhetorical and dramatic effect rather than to characterise his protagonist in a purely negative fashion as a *saeva noverca*.[64] In Seneca, as in Latin literature as a whole, it is not Phaedra but Juno who plays this rôle most consistently.

(ii) *Juno*

It was remarked earlier that Hera is not specifically referred to as a stepmother in Greek literature before Plato. For the Latin poets, by contrast, she becomes the wicked stepmother *par excellence*. The first example of this phenomenon is Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.288 ("carmine laudes/ Herculeas et facta ferunt: ut prima novercae/ monstra manu geminosque premens eliserit anguis" "in song they rehearse the praises of Hercules and his deeds: how he grabbed hold of the two snakes, the first monsters sent by his stepmother, and strangled them"). The conceit appealed to the Augustan elegists, especially Ovid, who em-

[62] 696f. "... genitor, invideo tibi:/ Colchide noverca maius hoc, maius malum est" ("... father, I envy you:/ this is an evil far greater than your stepmother from Colchis"). To Hippolytus the amorous *noverca* is even *more* evil than the murderess: he regards his father Theseus, whose life Medea attempted to destroy in her rôle of Theseus' *noverca*, as fortunate in comparison to himself, since stepmothers who kill their stepchildren are not doing as much harm as those who compromise their stepson's virtue. This viewpoint is of course especially suitable to a youth of Hippolytus' warped asceticism.

[63] She may also refer to herself as *noverca* again at 1200, though the assignation of speaker at lines 1199f. varies in the manuscripts, and they may be spoken by Theseus: so Zwierlein in the Oxford Classical Text (1986).

[64] In the case of the chorus' comment that Amor overcomes even *saevas novercas*, the effect is, in fact, the opposite—it emphasises Phaedra as a victim of Amor by showing the power of Amor is so extensive that it can even overcome women who conventionally ought to hate rather than love their stepsons. And where Hippolytus invokes the stereotype it characterises him, showing his intolerance and lack of understanding of Phaedra, rather than necessarily making her seem more stepmotherly.

ploys it in four passages,[65] as well as alluding to Juno as the *noverca* of Apollo and Artemis *(Met.* 6.336), and of Bacchus (*Fast.* 3.769). Tibullus (2.3.24) also makes the connection between Juno and Apollo, as does Propertius in the case of Hercules (4.9.44). The characterisation of Juno as a *noverca* reaches its culmination in the two Hercules plays in the Senecan corpus: these merit detailed examination.[66]

Seneca's portrait of Juno in the *Hercules Furens* is the most vivid psychological study, in extant literature, of a wicked stepmother. It is modelled to some extent on the wrathful goddess of the *Aeneid* and even more closely on Ovid's Juno in the *Metamorphoses*, where the emphasis on the goddess' attitude to *paelices* ('her husband's mistresses/ her rivals') clearly influenced the dramatist.[67] The play follows the basic plot of Euripides' *Heracles* (on the subject of Heracles' killing of his wife Megara and their children in a fit of madness), with some differences. Of these the most relevant to the present discussion concerns the rôle of divine intervention in the causation of Hercules' madness. In the Euripidean tragedy, where Heracles is represented as the innocent victim of Hera's capriciousness, the onset of the hero's madness is heralded by the sudden appearance of Hera's messenger, the goddess Iris, together with the sinister figure of Lyssa, who proceeds to carry out the orders of Hera and to drive Heracles insane. The timing of this divine visitation, immediately preceding the hero's murderous attack on his family, underscores the representation of the madness as resulting from possession by external agents; this is also emphasised by the stark contrast between the behaviour of Heracles when sane and when in the grip of madness.

In the *Hercules Furens*, by contrast, the divine intervention is transferred to the prologue, where Juno herself, described as Hercules' *noverca,* appears as speaker. As Juno represents the facts, Heracles has not only undertaken successfully every task she has imposed upon him, including the defeat of Death itself when he brought back Cerberus from the Underworld, but he vaunts his achievements in

[65] *Ep.* 9.8., *Fast.* 6.800., *Met.* 9.15, 135, 181., and *Ars* 2.217 where, in a witty, typically Ovidian, turn of phrase, Hercules is said to have won apotheosis after Juno got tired of sending monsters ('fatigata praebendo monstra' 'weary of providing monsters').

[66] Other examples from the post-Augustan period: (re Hercules): Luc., 4.637., Val. Fl., 3.580, 610, 5.43., Mart., 5.65.1., Stat., *Silv.* 3.1.22, 47, 137., *Ach.* 1.189., Sil., 2.478, 3.91., Claud., *Rap.* 2 pr 29; (re Bacchus): Sen., *Oed.* 418., Stat., *Theb.* 4.672, 10.886; (re Athena) Val. Fl., 3.506.

[67] Cf. especially Ov., *Met.* 2.508ff; also 3.259ff, 4.420ff.: see Fitch (1987) 116f.

hubristic fashion, and has now directed his ambitions towards heaven itself where, she fears, he will attempt to repeat the behaviour of past rulers by overthowing his father Jupiter.[68] It is for this reason that she must crush him without delay. When later in the play Hercules' madness suddenly begins without warning, its presence is signalled by hallucinations in which he imagines himself engaging in the very behaviour which Juno had accused him, in the prologue, of contemplating.

I would argue that the introduction into the drama of Juno in person, rather than the subordinate figures of Iris and Lyssa, together with the fact that the goddess makes her appearance at the very beginning of the play, serves to place special emphasis on her rôle as instigator of the hero's madness. Before discussing this further, however, it will be necessary first to examine briefly the two main lines of approach which scholars have taken to the play, since my interpretation differs from that accepted by the majority.

The view most widely held at the present time is that Seneca wants to stress the psychological origin of Hercules' madness, in other words, to show how his inherent character traits of violence, boastfulness and ambition lead in the inevitable course of events to madness.[69] In that case, Juno's importance in the Prologue is both to symbolise and to underscore the forces of madness present within Hercules himself and to which he will later succumb;[70] alternatively, the accusations made by Juno—which according to this view are to be taken at face value—are used to establish the character of Hercules from the start as prone to *hubris*. (Likewise, the hallucinations which he experiences in his maddened state are not simply inflicted by Juno but rather reflect the hero's subconscious ambitions and desires).

The second approach to the play has been to regard Hercules, like the Euripidean hero, as the innocent victim of a wrathful goddess:[71] Juno's description of him in the prologue is a biased distortion of the facts, and his hallucinations a sick joke on the part of Juno who maliciously causes the hero to act in such a way as to

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[68] 64f.: "caelo timendum est, regna ne summa occupet / qui vicit ima; sceptra praeripiet patri" ("one must fear for heaven, that he who has conquered the world below will seize the highest realms; he will usurp his father's throne").

[69] For a recent discussion, see Fitch (1987) 21ff. (note 19 p. 21 gives a convenient bibliography of scholarly views).

[70] E.g. Shelton (1978) 21ff.

[71] See especially Motto and Clark (1981), Lawall (1983), 6–26, Zwierlein (1984).

prove her accusations right. I would argue that this view is essentially correct, but with modifications. It is hard to claim that Hercules is competely innocent in this play, as he is in Euripides' *Heracles*. Whereas in the Euripidean drama there is a strong contrast between Hercules' demeanour when he is sane and after he goes mad, in the Senecan play the hero on several occasions displays a boastful self-confidence which might be regarded as provocative from Juno's point of view, and might reinforce her accusations of *hubris* to a certain degree.[72] But it is one thing to possess a self-assurance which is at least justified in the light of previous experience and quite another thing to go mad and kill one's family.[73] What Juno does is to distort Hercules' pride in what he has already achieved and reinterpret this as hubristic ambition to overthrow heaven itself. Hercules' behaviour could be said to fuel Juno's anger, but it needs the catalyst of Juno's direct interference to turn the hero into 'a parody of himself'.

As I suggested earlier, the appearance of Juno in the prologue, rather than lessening the importance of the external motivation[74] for Hercules' madness, throws it into greater prominence by placing stress on it from the very beginning of the play.[75] By making Juno herself the prologue speaker, Seneca establishes her rôle in the events from the start of the drama, and she remains in the listener's consciousness throughout. The madness itself, it is true, begins with no divine intervention, as in Euripides, but the initial hallucinations, a device to signal the onset of this madness, inevitably recall Juno's accusations in the prologue, thus indirectly bringing her to the fore at the crucial moment before the murders begin. Juno is much more important as a character in Seneca than in the Euripidean play. There, her actions are not explained, her anger is simply accepted as

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[72] The choral ode following the prologue, in which a warning against the folly of human ambition is obviously aimed at Hercules, also backs up Juno's accusations: cf. Fitch (1987) 162f.

[73] The argument of Fitch is that excessive *affectus* ('emotions') are akin to madness in Stoic terms. But this does not mean that Seneca is aiming to show that *affectus* lead inevitably to madness.

[74] See, for instance, Fitch (1987) 32f., who argues that since the myth of Juno's persecution of Hercules could not be ignored by Seneca, he transfers Juno to the prologue so that the divine motivation can be separated as far as possible from the onset of the madness. Juno's rôle is thus established (dual motivation) but then left to one side as the events of the play take their course without further interruption: in this way the madness is more clearly seen as the inevitable consequence of Hercules' own behaviour.

[75] cf. Lawall (1983), 23.

existing. She is a representative of the capricious and seemingly unjust acts attributed by man to the gods. In Seneca, appearing as she does *in person*, she is given the opportunity to explain her position: in fact, we see Juno's thought processes in action.[76]

In arguing against the view that Hercules' madness is psychological in origin, Lawall pointed out that this fails to take account of the whole tradition, seen for instance in the *Aeneid*, of Juno as the angry goddess who relentlessly persecutes her enemies. But the Juno of Seneca's Prologue is more than this: she is also a *noverca*, and as such exhibits the characteristics of the stereotypical stepmother. This aspect of Juno's characterisation has been largely ignored in discussions of the play, but it is crucial to our understanding of it.

Juno's position is made clear from the outset. She begins (line 1) by describing herself as 'soror Tonantis' ('sister of the Thunderer')—the only title left to her since she can no longer fairly regard herself as Jupiter's wife. This goes immediately to the root of Juno's psychology in the play: her powerful sexual jealousy of Jupiter's constant infidelities, which is an integral part of her stepmotherly hatred of Hercules, son of her husband's mistress Alcmene. The idea[77] that Juno has been driven from the sky by *paelices* ('her husband's mistresses/her rivals')—used in the first instance to explain her presence on earth as Prologue speaker—leads on to a catalogue of constellations which owe their place in the sky to Jupiter's various love affairs. The emphasis on *paelices* who have won a place in heaven forshadows her specific accusations against Hercules, the most compelling of which is that he too has been promised a place in the sky, but has ambitions to take this place by force. Beginning with examples of Jupiter's mistresses, the catalogue passes imperceptibly to the subject of the offspring of these *paelices*, such as Perseus and Bacchus, again preparing the way for the emphasis on Hercules and the motif, first spelt out in line 21, of Juno as stepmother.

In the prologue we are offered a dramatic presentation of Juno's train of thought, a revelation of the inner workings of stepmotherly psychology. In the first instance, she is angry at Hercules simply for what he is—the son of a *paelex*. It is for this reason she has sent

[76] Cf. Fitch (1987) 115–6, 141.

[77] Seneca takes his lead from Ovid—in *Met.* 2 Juno, seeing the *paelex* Callisto shining amongst the stars, goes to Tethys and Oceanus to beg them not to let that constellation set in the Ocean: her reason for coming from heaven is that another woman has taken over her place in the sky ("pro me tenet altera caelum" 513).

monsters against the hero in the past. Now, however, her anger is rekindled by a further fact—her stepson has enjoyed enormous success in countering the attempts she has made to destroy him. In his stepmother's eyes he is likely to achieve what all stepmothers dread —the inheritance of his father.

Juno's present anger at Hercules is sparked by two factors: 1) his present success 2) his future ambitions.

In the first case, Juno is particularly distressed by Hercules' most recent exploits in the Underworld. His violent attack on the Underworld, his daring in laying bare the hidden mysteries of the Earth, and his flaunting of the dog Cerberus through the cities of Greece, are presented by Juno as examples of hubristic, violent and megalomanic behaviour.[78] Hercules' behaviour when he first appears, however, gives the lie to Juno's accusations. He emphasises that he went to the underworld because he was ordered to do so (596f. "iussus in lucem extuli/ arcana mundi" "under orders I have brought into the light of day the secrets of the Underworld"), he prays to Phoebus to pardon him for showing Cerberus to the world above (595f.), he tells all except Juno to turn away their gaze from the ominous sight (600ff.). Although he could have reigned in the Underworld he did not chose to do so.[79] Juno's version of events is, therefore, distorted, the result of her bias towards him: in common with all stepmothers, she cannot bear to see her stepson enjoying success.[80] This is not to say that Hercules' behaviour is innocent from Juno's viewpoint. It would have been better for him had he gone quietly about his business and not boasted about his achievements. But his pride and self-confidence do not warrant the reaction that they spark on the part of Juno—it is because of her relationship to him as stepmother that she reacts with

[78] Cf. especially 57ff. "at ille, rupto carcere umbrarum ferox,/ de me triumphat et superbifica manu / atrum per urbes ducit Argolicas canem" ("but he, insolent after having broken open the prison of the shades (of the dead), triumphs over me and with pride-bringing hand leads the dark hound through the Argive cities").

[79] 609f. ". . . si placerent tertiae sortis loca, / regnare potui" (". . . if the realms of the third allotment please me, I could have reigned there"). This last statement in particular has been taken as an example of *hubris*, but Hercules might simply be speaking the truth—he was so successful in subduing Cerberus that he could have been king—but he was not ambitious/hubristic enough to chose that path.

[80] Several other statements and actions of Hercules in the course of the play have been taken as backing up Juno's accusations against Hercules. A conspicuous case is Hercules' reference to prayers 'worthy of Jupiter and me' ('preces/Iove meque dignas' 926–7) which he is about to offer immediately prior to his attack of insanity. Shelton, for example, says that Hercules is hubristicly comparing himself to the gods

such violent anger. It particularly irks her that by attacking her stepson all she has achieved is to give him the chance to prove that Jupiter is his father (and so make public Jupiter's adultery and Juno's shame) and secondly to win glory for himself:[81] granted that this was anathema to a stepmother, the fact that he rubs it in is especially provocative.

Secondly, Juno accuses Hercules of cherishing a desire to attack heaven itself and to force his way by violence to his promised reward (lines 64ff.). From Juno's viewpoint, such ambitions would seem a natural outcome of the hubristic attitude which she attributes to Hercules. But since this *hubris* is a distortion of the truth, Juno's statement about her stepson's plans for the future is likewise a falsehood. Moreover, there is nothing in Hercules' sane behaviour that would lead us to believe he harboured such ambitions: all his acts—even if carried out in a violent way in keeping with his enormous strength—have been performed either *iussus* ('under orders'), e.g. the attack on Cerberus or, in the case of Lycus, to avenge *nefas* ('sin').[82] Juno's charges against Hercules, though untrue, are, however, psychologically realistic, the direct result of her stepmotherly rôle. The worst fear of the archetypal stepmother is that her stepson will become his father's heir, and by attacking Jupiter himself this is precisely what Hercules would achieve. Juno's accusations, then, rather than representing Hercules' subconscious desires, are nothing less than a projection of the subconscious stepmotherly fears of Juno herself that her stepson will 'inherit' his father's kingdom.

To a large extent, Juno displays the characteristics of a typical

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((1978) 64 n.24). I would argue, however, that Hercules' attitude is justified. Not only is he the son of Jupiter, who has undertaken with enormous success all the tasks imposed upon him, but he has been promised a reward in heaven and, as Juno herself admits, is called a god all over the world—are we to assume that he has not heard what people have been saying? Consider, moreover, the context in which Hercules utters the words. Having slain Lycus, the impious tyrant, Hercules piously offers prayers to Jupiter for the peace of the world, a world which will be free of monsters, and in particular, tyrants. But this peace has only become possible because Hercules himself has rid the world of these monsters—it is in this sense that the prayers he offers are to be worthy of himself.

[81] Cf. 34ff.... "in laudes suas / mea vertit odia; dum nimis saeva impero, / patrem probavi, gloriae feci locum" ("... he turns my hatred to his own credit; while giving orders, excessively cruel, /I have proved who his father is, I have given him the opportunity to win glory").

[82] Cf. 632ff., also (after killing Lycus) Hercules says "*ultrice* dextra fusus adverso Lycus / terram cecidit ore" ("Lycus, vanquished by my avenging right hand, has struck the earth with his face turned downward" 895f.).

noverca. She is jealous, both sexually and of the success of her stepson. Cunning and treachery are manifest not only in her habitual plotting against Hercules, but especially in the present plot—to make Hercules fight himself.[83] Most importantly, Juno is violent and lacking in self-control. She herself represents as it were the irrational force of *furor* ('madness') with which she will inspire the hero. These qualities are motifs from the beginning: the catalogue of her woes, though conventional in form, in this instance reinforces by its sheer length the relentless and uncontrolled hostility of the goddess towards her rivals and their offspring; there are references to her 'violentus animus' ('violent disposition') and her 'saevus dolor' ('savage indignation') which result in 'iras' ('anger) and 'aeterna bella' ('everlasting wars' 28–29).[84] At line 85, having rejected, after some consideration, the use of other figures of violence (e.g. the Titans) against Hercules, Juno decides that the only fit match for Hercules is himself: to this end she must arouse the Eumenides from the depths of Tartarus, along with other terrifying figures such as Scelus, Impietas, Error and Furor: the list culminates in the vivid portrait of Megaera leading the assault.[85] Not only are the forces of evil, violence and madness to be used as servants of Juno's purposes, but an identification of Juno with these forces is made, notably in her command to the Furies to strike her mad herself so that she may do something 'dignum noverca' ('worthy of a stepmother' 110–12). The uncontrolled anger of the goddess is thrown into relief by contrast with the self-control displayed by Hercules at the end of the play, where, by deciding against suicide, he achieves true *virtus*, that is, the ability to exercise self-restraint and to accept Stoically the burden imposed upon him. Like so many other stepmothers, Juno is the ultimate loser, her stepson eventually triumphing over her attempts to destroy him.[86]

The theme of the *saeva noverca* is even more prominent in the

[83] Cf. 85 "bella iam secum gerat" ("let him now do battle with himself"); 116 "se vincat" ("let him conquer himself").

[84] Cf. also the use of *ira* 'anger' (34, 75), *odia* 'hatred' (35, 77), *saeva* 'savage' (35).

[85] 101ff.: . . . "agmen horrendum anguibus / Megaera ducat atque luctifica manu / vastam rogo flagrante corripiat trabem" (". . . the band bristling with snakes / let Megaera lead and with grief-bringing hand / snatch a vaste beam from the flaming pyre").

[86] Motto and Clark (1981), 115, point out the irony that Juno's attempts to destroy Hercules not only fail but they provide him with the opportunity to achieve his greatest success—self-mastery.

second Senecan play on the Hercules theme, the *Hercules Oetaeus*.[87] The characterisation of Hercules in this play centres on his rôle as the Stoic hero who wins immortality through his achievements and his benefits to mankind, and above all by his triumph over pain through mental fortitude.[88] Although the hero's violent destruction of the city of Oechalia is not ignored, it is emphasised mainly by the chorus of Oechalian women whose view is obviously biased. Most importantly, the destructive force of uncontrolled sexual passion is not stressed in this play (in contrast to Sophocles' *Trachiniae*) in connection with Hercules' seizure of Iole.[89] This is not to say, however, that immoderate violence is absent from the drama: on the contrary, it is a *leit-motif*. But the propensity to uncontrolled anger which is one of the integral components of Hercules' character in the mythological tradition is in this play largely transferred elsewhere: to the *ferae* ('wild beasts') which comprised his labours and which are alluded to with extraordinary frequency, to Juno his stepmother and, most strikingly, to Deianira, who becomes as it were an *altera Juno* ('a second Juno'). If anything illustrates the dangers of uncontrolled passion, it is not the sexual lust of Hercules for Iole but the violent reaction to his behaviour, the sexual jealousy, displayed by his wife Deianira.[90]

Juno is referred to as the *noverca* of Hercules on no less than 19 occasions.[91] This time, the prologue is spoken by Hercules, who complains that his deeds have not won him the reward in heaven he

[87] In the following discussion, I assume the play to have been written by Seneca, though the question is far from settled: for arguments in favour of Senecan authorship, see M. Rozelaar, "Neue Studien zur Tragödie 'Hercules Oetaeus'", *ANRW* 32.2 (1985) 1348–1406, R.G.M. Nisbet, "The Oak and the Axe: Symbolism in Seneca, *Hercules Oetaeus*", in *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, ed. M. Whitby, P. Hardie and M. Whitby (Bristol: 1987) 243–251. Against: see for example Bertil Axelson, *Korruptelenkult: Studien zur Textkritik der unechten Seneca-Tragödie "Hercules Oetaeus"* (Lund: 1967), Tarrant (1985) 9, Otto Zwierlein, *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Wiesbaden: 1986) 313–444, M. Billerbeck, *Senecas Tragödien: Sprachliche und Stilistische Untersuchungen* (Leiden, Mnemosyne Suppl. 105: 1988) 145–73.

[88] Cf. Galinsky (1972) 174ff.

[89] In the *Trachiniae*, Cypris is blamed for the tragedy (860f., cf. 497ff.) and the sexual theme applies to both Deianira and Heracles (cf. also the phallic symbolism of Deianira's suicide by the sword on the marriage bed: in Seneca, although she debates which method of suicide to use, we are not told the details).

[90] Cf. Pratt (1983) 124.

[91] In contrast, in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* the only mention of Hera is at 1048, where Heracles says that his present woe is greater than anything previously devised by the wife of Zeus and Eurystheus.

had hoped for. The hatred and anger of his *noverca* Juno is often emphasised in contrast to his own rôle as pacifier (e.g. lines 3–10, 97f.; for Juno's hatred cf. also 38, 52, 78 etc.) By referring to the monsters killed by him who now have a place in the sky (65ff.), he answers the complaints voiced by Juno in the *Furens* that the heavens are filled with *paelices* ('her husband's mistresses/her rivals'). Later, when Hercules is in the grip of the agonies caused by the poisoned robe, his attitude to his stepmother changes to fit the circumstances: for once, he would welcome an attack by her if only it would put an end to his present suffering.[92]

It is not, however, Juno who is Hercules' major antagonist in this play. The allusions to her anger are all made with reference to the past; she has ceased to persecute the hero and at the end must become placated in preparation for Hercules' ascent into heaven as her new son-in-law. Rather, the rôle played in the earlier drama by Juno is largely transferred to Deianira. Although the portrayal of Deianira in the grip of *furor* ('madness') is to some extent parallel to Hercules' madness in the *Furens*, Deianira also performs a similar function to the Juno of that play. As we saw, Juno's jealous anger is closely associated in the *Furens* with the forces of madness, and in the *Oetaeus* sexual jealousy likewise inspires a violent overreaction on the part of Deianira to the news of Hercules' affair with Iole.[93]

The theme of *furor* finds expression in the vocabulary employed, especially in the scene where Deianira rages against Hercules and Iole and the nurse attempts to restrain her.[94] Terms implying madness occur repeatedly (*furor*: 233, 309, 434, 439; *furo/furens*: 250, 273, 285, cf. 240 "stetit furenti similis ac torvum intuens" ("she stood like a madwoman and looking askance"); *lymphata* ('frenzied') 246; "pectoris sani parum" ("of an insane mind") 275; *demens* 314); there are also many references to *ira* ('anger'), *dolor* ('indignation'), *minae* ('threats')

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[92] Lines 1316ff.; cf. Ov., *Met.* 9.178ff.

[93] Seneca's characterisation of Deianira owes much to Ovid's in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Heroides*. At *Met.* 9.151, Deianira contemplates killing the *paelex*; in *Her.* 9, like the Juno of the *Hercules Furens* prologue, she recites a list of Hercules' *paelices* (49ff.); she says Hercules has made her a *noverca* (54: cf. Sen., *Her.F.* 21). As well, later in the poem (145ff.) there is a sudden change when she learns the effect of the robe on Hercules and her speech becomes very rhetorical and melodramatic, as in the *Oetaeus* .

[94] Such 'Passion-Restraint' scenes are typically found in the second act of Senecan plays: see Richard J. Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon* (Cambridge: 1976) 192ff. and (1985) 116, Fitch (1987) 183.

and so on. In keeping with this are comparisons with wild animals: the *furor* of a jealous woman, comments the nurse, is more fearful than Scylla and Charybdis, worse than any *fera* ('wild beast'):

> o quam cruentus feminas stimulat furor,
> cum patuit una paelici et nuptae domus!
> Scylla et Charybdis Sicula contorquens freta
> minus est timenda, nulla non melior fera est (233f.)
>
> o what blood-thirsty madness goads women,
> when the one house has opened its doors to both mistress and wife!
> Scylla and Charybdis which whirls the Sicilian straits
> are less fearful, there is no wild beast that is not more gentle.

She goes on to describe the reaction of Deianira to Iole, comparing her to both a Maenad and an Armenian tigress leaping out from beneath a rock to protect her young (241ff.).

More specifically, Deianira, having been turned into Hercules' enemy, is identified with the *ferae* ('wild beasts') of the labours. In her opening speech, she entreats Juno to send another *fera* to attack her husband on her behalf: if a suitable candidate is lacking, then may Juno transform Deianira herself into some monstrous instrument of vengeance (257–65). Deianira's own anger is in itself a sufficient *fera* ('wild beast') to punish Hercules. Again, she says that though Hercules may have pacified the whole world [sc. by ridding it of *ferae*], "est aliquid hydra peius: iratae dolor/ nuptae" ("there is something worse than the hydra: the indignation of an angry wife" 284f.). In her threats, then, Deianira imagines that she herself will be the one *fera* that Hercules is unable to overcome. Even when the nurse suggests that she may die in the attempt, the image is maintained, in a slightly altered form: if Hercules kills her, says Deianira, she will be numbered among the *ferae* slain by Hercules during his labours (340ff.). And later in the play, when Hercules is bent on revenge against Deianira, not knowing that she has in fact killed herself, the same idea is employed, this time by Hercules himself: if her kills her, a woman will become the *summus Herculeus labor* ('final labour of Hercules' 1455).

When Deianira suddenly abandons her murderous designs on her husband and his mistress and decides instead to employ means to restore his love, there seems, on the surface, a striking change in her character. Now, she resembles the Deianira of the *Trachiniae* in that, far from wishing Hercules dead, she is distraught when she realises

that she herself is the unwitting instrument of his destruction, and she insists on suicide even though she is morally innocent. But Seneca's characterisation of Deianira, in fact, remains consistent. Her reaction to the ensuing events—the discovery that the magic potion may be lethal rather than aphrodisiac, the news of Hercules' sufferings when he puts on the robe—is hysterical, verging on the unbalanced, just as her response to the appearance of Iole as Hercules' mistress had been earlier in the play. If Hercules in the *Oetaeus* acquires the status of Stoic hero, triumphing over all suffering by force of willpower, Deianira, in her lack of control over her emotions and the violence of her reactions, is the exact opposite.[95] Thus, when she enters to relate the disturbing experience which indicates that the love charm may in fact be harmful, her terror at what she has seen is excessive:

> vagus per artus errat excussos tremor,
> erectus horret crinis, impulsis adhuc
> stat terror animis et cor attonitum salit
> pavidumque trepidis palpitat venis iecur.
> ut fractus austro pontus etiamnum tumet,
> quamvis quiescat languidis ventis dies,
> ita mens adhuc vexatur excusso metu (707ff.).[96]
>
> an unsteady trembling steals through my shaken limbs:
> my hair stands on end, in my mind still passion-tossed
> terror stands firm and my heart leaps in agitation
> and in fear my liver quivers with throbbing veins.
> as the sea tossed by the south wind continues to swell
> though now the weather is calm and the winds gentle,
> so my mind is still tormented though fear has been allayed.

Her emotions on hearing Hyllus' report of the effect wrought by the robe on Hercules, are expressed at length, in particular in three speeches (842–884, 934–982, 984–1024) characterised by rapid shifts of thought (Jupiter should strike her with his thunderbolt; she should commit suicide by the sword or jumping off a cliff (860ff: many gory details); she should suffer public chastisement or undergo retribution at the hands of Juno herself—all this in the first of the three passages. In the second, she lists the various punishments in Tartarus

[95] Cf. also the references to her showing her feelings on her face (250, 705), in direct contrast to the Chorus' description (227–32) of the happy man who is able to bear his fortunes 'animo aequo' ('with equanimity'): this includes the ability to control one's facial expressions.

[96] Note that the Chorus, seeing her coming, liken her to a Bacchant (700ff.).

which she feels she should take on herself; in the third, after entreating Hyllus to strike down his mother, she begins to hallucinate as she describes a vision of the underworld with gates thrown open: she beholds the Fury Tisiphone, to whom she pleads the excuse that her crime was committed through love; next, she feels an earth tremor and sees all the nations of the earth threatening her with vengeance for the loss of their deliverer. Death is the only escape, and she runs off *moritura* ('destined to die') as Hyllus exclaims 'fugit attonita' ('she has fled in a frenzy' 1024).[97]

In keeping with the portrayal of Deianira as subject to violent emotions and *furor*, the stepmother theme is exploited to its full extent. We made the point earlier that in this play Juno's' rôle is usurped by Deianira, since the latter wishes to become, and later does become, the instrument of Hercules' destruction. As an *altera Juno* Deianira also takes on the rôle of *noverca*.

The identification of Deianira with Juno is seen in two areas: first in her threats against Hercules in the initial stages when she plans to kill him, and later, when she has actually become, albeit unwittingly, responsible for Hercules' destruction. In her opening speech, after requesting Juno to send a *fera* against Hercules, she then decides that her own anger is such that she can fulfil the function herself (269–75). In the next speech, Juno as *noverca* will be her guide as she exacts punishment on her hated rival ("aderit noverca, quae manus nostras regat" "a (his) stepmother will be at hand to guide my hands" 313). In excusing her murderous designs against her husband as self-defence, lest Hercules kill her and their son as he did his former wife Megara, Deianira accuses Hercules of feigning madness and blaming it on his stepmother as a novel means of 'divorcing' an unwanted wife (429ff.): like Juno in the *Furens*, Deianira deliberately misrepresents Hercules through her jaundiced bias against him. Later, after Hercules has been destroyed through the agency of Deianira, she is associated with Juno: she refers to herself as a 'noverca peius irata malum' ('evil worse than an enraged stepmother' 852) and later calls on Juno to strike her down with Jupiter's thunderbolt as she has deprived the goddess of a glorious triumph by killing herself Juno's

[97] On sudden shifts in emotions as typical of Senecan female characters, see Fitch (1987) 207. Her guilt-ridden hysteria, however, is in this case psychologically realistic, given that before she decided to try the aphrodisiac she had wanted to kill Hercules: those who harbour murderous thoughts are prone to excessive guilt if the person they wish dead really does die.

great enemy (880ff.). Likewise, Hercules says that his *noverca*, Juno, should feel shame because a mortal woman, rather than herself, has destroyed him (1186ff).

As well as becoming identified with Juno in her relationship to Hercules, Deianira also displays a stepmotherly attitude towards the *paelex* Iole and her possible offspring by Hercules. In reply to the nurse's warning that an attack on Hercules will result in her own death, Deianira says that if she dies, she will do so happily, for her attack will interrupt the very marriage rites of her *paelex* and Deianira will go to the Underworld as Hercules' wife; moreover she will avenge herself on Iole by murdering both her and her unborn child in a gruesome manner:

> ... si quid ex nostro Hercule
> concepit Iole, manibus evellam meis
> ante et per ipsas paelicem invadam faces.
> me nuptiali victimam feriat die
> infestus, Iolen dum supra exanimem ruam (345–49)
> ... if a child from my Hercules
> Iole has conceived, I will pluck it out with my own hands first
> and in the midst of the very marriage torches I will attack my husband's mistress.
> on his wedding day let him slaughter me as a victim
> in hostility, provided that I fall dead on top of Iole's corpse.

Notice that Deianira's behaviour is not that typically associated with stepmothers in general: she is not, like the majority of stepmothers, a second wife with stepchildren from a previous relationship; her attack is against her husband's mistress as well as the 'stepchild'; she pictures herself attempting to stop that child's birth. In all these respects she is similar to Juno, a resemblance which suggests that her stepmotherly behaviour is to be seen as a result of her taking over the rôle of Juno as *noverca*.

Finally, a comment on the significance of the stepmother theme in the *Hercules Furens* and the *Hercules Oetaeus* taken together. Significant structural parallels can be discerned in the two plays.[98] In both, the

[98] The second play is surely intended as a sequel to the first (this applies regardless of the authorship). In several places where the madness of Hercules is alluded to, it is treated as if it were the most recent event in Hercules' life, whereas, given Hyllus' age, the killing of Megara must have taken place some years earlier. Also, the reference in the prologue by Hercules to the monsters which Juno has transferred to the heavens (64ff.) looks like a reposte to Juno's complaint about the *paelices* who occupy heaven in the *Furens* prologue (cf. Galinsky (1972) 174).

hero, proud and confident in the face of his outstanding physical achievements, attains true *virtus* at the end by overcoming with mental fortitude his own suffering: this consists, in the former case, of mental anguish, in the latter, of physical pain. In each play he is pitted against a figure—Juno and Deianira—who represents the forces of uncontrolled emotion, and he triumphs at the end by acquiring the ability to exercise self-restraint. Just as Juno's unrelenting fury in the *Furens* stands in contrast to the acquired temperance of Hercules,[99] in the *Oetaeus* Deianira's suicide, despite the pleas of her son Hyllus to bear her woes in the way that Hercules did when he too killed a spouse accidentally, is indicative of her inability to exercise control over her emotions.

It is also significant that in both plays the forces antagonistic to Hercules are feminine, while the hero is aligned with his father Jupiter. The plays could be viewed as a demonstration of the triumph of masculine *virtus* over the wiles, jealousy and lack of self-restraint so commonly associated with the female in ancient texts. The male-female dichotomy assumes special prominence in the *Oetaeus*. Amid the agonies inflicted on him by the poisoned robe which was the gift of his wife, Hercules seems to feel greatest distress at the thought that he will die at the hands of a female: rather than suffer this shame, he would even prefer to have been killed by his stepmother Juno—at least she has some status (1179ff.).

> invicta si me cadere feminea manu
> voluere fata perque tam turpes colus
> mea mors cucurrit, cadere placuisset mihi
> Iunonis odio: feminae caderem manu,
> sed caelum habentis.
> if that I should perish by the hand of a woman
> the invincible fates have willed and so shamefully the thread
> of my life has run its course, I wish that I could have died
> through the hatred of Juno: I would be dying at the hand of a woman,
> but at least of one who rules in heaven.

He is also overwhelmed with shame that his pain has forced him to shed tears for the first time(1264ff). In the interview with his mother Alcmena he again stresses the female origin of his downfall ('feminae iratae' 'of an angry woman' 1354, 'venenis . . . femineis' 'for a woman's

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[99] In his decision not to commit suicide he exerts self-control: he must bear his suffering rather than take the easy way out.

poison' 1356). Hercules' final words, as reported by Philoctetes, include a reproach to Alcmena not to weep with 'dolor femineus' ('womanly grief').[100] It is also significant in this connection that the sexual 'double standard' which is an integral part of the mythical tradition with respect to Juno[101] is applied to the story of Hercules and Iole. Just as Jupiter's adulterous affair with Alcmena is beyond criticism (except on the part of Juno herself) while Juno's sexual jealousy is presented as unreasonable and destructive, so in the *Oetaeus* Hercules is not blamed (except by his wife) for displaying uncontrolled sexual lust in connection with Iole, rather it is the violent reaction to it on the part of Deianira, born of sexual jealousy, which causes the destruction of Hercules' body. (Even when Deianira's innocence is revealed, Hercules' death is attributed, by Hyllus, not to any fault on his own part but to the treachery of Nessus (1468), who, as a half-human monster and treacherous, can be aligned with the female).

If the Hercules plays are concerned with the triumph of Stoic *virtus* over the forces of uncontrolled emotion, as well as with the contrast between masculine self-control and feminine intemperance, then it is especially appropriate that the theme of the *saeva noverca* is prominent in both, since the stereotypical stepmother encapsulates those qualities thought to be essentially femine: emotional instability, lack of self-restraint, jealousy and treacherousness.

C. *Origin of the Stepmother Theme in the Declamation*

I have discussed the characterisation of the stepmother in the Roman declamation, and how the concept of the *saeva noverca* underlies the portrayal of stepmothers in Latin literature, in particular the mythological figures of Phaedra and Juno. Given that the declamatory *noverca* has features which distinguish her from the stepmother of Greek myth,[102] it is worth pausing to consider whether this figure is a creation of the Roman declaimers or whether she was inherited, along

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[100] Lines 1674–5: it would give pleasure to Juno to see her *paelex* in tears; for a similar reason he hates to give Juno the pleasure of seeing himself weeping (line 1277).

[101] It goes back to Homer, where Juno is punished for her mistreatment of Hercules (*Iliad* 15. 18–24), while Jupiter, by contrast, can recite with impunity a catalogue of his affairs to Hera in bed (*Iliad* 14.313ff.).

[102] See discussion at beginning of this chapter.

with other topics, from the Hellenistic system of rhetorical education imported to Rome in the early first century BC. Certainly many of the themes common in the Roman declamation can be traced back to the beginnings of this tradition in the late 4th century: according to Philostratus, rhetorical exercises used at this time included the themes of "poor men, rich men, men renowned for bravery and tyrants".[103] Although such characters were familiar from Roman society as well, they had their declamatory origin in everyday Greek life at the end of the 4th century (perhaps via New Comedy: see further below).[104] In the case of stepmothers, a real-life precedent is Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great, some of whose stepchildren were among her many alleged victims.[105] There is no concrete evidence, however, that the wicked stepmother was among the themes employed in 4th century rhetoric.

Some testimony to the practice of earlier Greek rhetoric may be provided by Greek declamation of the Roman period. Lucian's early declamation, *Abdicatus*, is on the same theme as Seneca, *Con.* 4.5 (the doctor stepson who refuses to treat his stepmother), while the subject of [Quint.], *Decl.* 2 (the stepmother who accuses her blind stepson of murdering his father) is found in Libanius, *Decl.* 49. Mention should also be made of the Greek novel of Heliodorus, the *Aethiopica*, which contains an amorous stepmother story and in which the influence of declamation is an important element.[106] If it is accepted that later

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[103] Philostratus, *Vit.Soph.* 1.481: he attributes the development of a new type of rhetorical teaching to Aeschines, who taught in Rhodes after his expulsion from Athens in 330BC; Quintilian (*Inst.* 2.4.41) says fictional rhetorical exercises started with Demetrius of Phalerum (late 4th century), which fits with Philostratus in terms of dating. See Russell (1983) 18, Fairweather (1981) 107f., who compares also (110ff.) the tetralogies of Antiphon (5th century Sophist) as forerunners of *controversiae*. In her later article (1984) 544–7, she puts greater stress on the continuity between Antiphon and Aeschines.

[104] Bonner (1949) 34ff. points out that many themes usually regarded as Greek are common in Roman life as well. No doubt they were adopted from Greek rhetoric by the Romans at a time when they had a special relevance for the Romans as well (e.g. tyrants under Caesar and pirates at the time of Sextus Pompeius).

[105] E.g. the story in Plutarch, *Alex.* 77.5 that the mental deficiency of Philip Arrhidaeus, which caused his father Philip to prefer the slightly younger Alexander as his heir, was brought about by φάρμακα ('potions') administered to the boy by his stepmother Olympias. There is also, at an earlier date, the stepmother who features in Antiphon's first speech (discussed in chapter 3).

[106] The story also shows the influence of Euripides (for instance, the maid plays a large rôle). Although the plot is extremely intricate, the basic story is familiar: a stepmother, Demaenete, falls in love with her stepson and after her attempts to seduce him fail, she denounces him to his father, who punishes him. The false

Greek writers were not influenced in any way by the literature of Rome, then the stepmother theme in Lucian, Libanius and Heliodorus may provide evidence for earlier Greek rhetorical practice, though it is noteworthy that the theme is rare in Greek declamation by comparison with its Roman counterpart.[107] Another piece of evidence, though tenuous, is the fact that several of the declaimers mentioned by Seneca in the *Controversiae* as treating topics involving a stepmother were of Greek origin.[108] Though most of these lived in Rome, where they may have first become acquainted with the *saeva noverca*, a significant exception, however, is Hybreas, who ran a school in Asia Minor in the late 30's BC and who apparently never visited Rome.[109]

In sum, there is little certain evidence that malevolent stepmothers played a substantial rôle in Greek rhetoric, though they were probably not unknown.[110] Certainly, the prominence of the *saeva noverca*

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accusation in this case takes a novel twist: the stepmother says that she was kicked in the stomach when pregnant by her stepson while admonishing him for his drinking and womanizing, behaviour that she had not previously mentioned to his father for fear of being thought a malicious stepmother. The ending of the story is novel, too. After further complications, the stepson is publicly exiled; the stepmother eventually meets her just deserts when her maid betrays her by hatching a plot to have her caught by her husband for adultery (the stepmother's love is exploited by the nurse, who gets her to a bedroom by pretending that her stepson will be brought there; instead, the maid brings the husband, telling him that his wife has been with a lover who has escaped. The husband believes the story and the stepmother commits suicide in despair). Noteworthy is the way in which Demaenete is portrayed throughout as a wicked stepmother. She is said to have seduced her future husband with wiles and then to have used these on his son. The son is represented as initially amazed at her friendliness towards him, given that she is his stepmother, not his mother. When the son is brought before the assembly, and is heard to cry out that a stepmother is the cause of his destruction, many listeners immediately suspect the truth. And at the son's sentence of exile Demaenete, with typically stepmotherly sneakiness, affects a public display of grief, causing her friends to praise her for behaving like a mother.

[107] According to Russell (1983) 3, the Greeks never borrowed anything from the Romans. The Second Sophistic, represented by Lucian, is regarded as traceable in a direct line back to Aeschines.

[108] Arellius Fuscus, Argentarius, Artemo, L. Cestius Pius, Diocles, Euctemon, Glycon, Hermagoras, Hybreas and Nicocrates.

[109] See Bornecque (1967) 172. Diocles (date unknown) seems also not to have declaimed in Italy: Bornecque (1967) 165.

[110] A further indication that the stepmother was not a common figure of rhetoric is her virtual absence—at least in her malevolent form—in Greek New Comedy and the Roman plays based thereon (given the thematic similarities between Hellenistic Greek rhetoric and the New Comedy, we might have expected stepmothers in Comedy if they were also popular in rhetoric). In Plautus' *Cistellaria* (based on Menander's *Synaristosai*), though the character Phanostrata is a stepmother, the fact is irrelevant to the plot. The only other stepmother is in the *Phasma* of Menander,

in the Latin declamation may be regarded as a Roman development, for which an explanation must be sought in areas other than the Hellenistic rhetorical tradition.

Jerome, writing at a later period, regarded the *saeva noverca* as a topos of both Comedy and Mime as well as rhetoric:[111] it is possible, then, that the stage provided the impetus for the theme in the declamation. Although wicked stepmothers do not occur in the *palliatae* (Comedies in Greek dress) of Plautus and Terence,[112] there is some evidence for them in the *fabula togata* (Comedy in the toga, i.e. Roman dress) a genre, significantly, based on Roman life.[113] The earliest representative of this genre, Titinius (early 2nd century BC) wrote at least two plays concerned with steprelationships. The *Insubra* contained the line "laudor quod osculavi privignae caput" ("I am praised because I kissed my stepdaughter's head"). Though it is unclear whether the speaker is male or female, it is possible that the reference is to a *noverca* who has attempted to demonstrate publicly that her relationship with her stepdaughter is more harmonious than usual.[114] On the other hand, the gesture of kissing can indicate reconciliation, in which case the plot may have concerned a dispute between a stepdaughter and either her stepmother or stepfather, which

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but this *noverca* is in no way *saeva*; rather, she works to bring about the marriage of her stepson to her illegitimate daughter (see Donatus on Ter., *Eun.* prol. 9.3, and for a discussion of the play, A.W. Gomme and F.H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford: 1973) 673–682). That the bad reputation of the stepmother was at least alluded to in New Comedy is clear from a fragment of an unknown poet preserved at Diod. Sic., 12.14 in connection with the Laws of Charondas (discussed in chapter 1 above). Among the *sententiae* attributed to Menander (*Mon.* 189) occurs the sentiment δεινότερον οὐδὲν ἄλλο μητρυιᾶς κακόν ('no evil is more dreadful than a stepmother'); the source of this is unknown. Such statements, however, are not necessarily evidence that a wicked stepmother appeared as a character in a play: they may have been spoken in the context of an old man considering remarriage and being advised against it for the sake of his children.

[111] "Omnes comoediae et mimographi et communes loci in novercam saevissimam declamabunt" ("every Comedy and all writers of Mimes and every rhetorical cliché will speak out against the very cruel stepmother" *Ep.* 54.15.4).

[112] See above n. 110.

[113] It was also a more serious genre (see W. Beare (1940), "The Fabula Togata", *Hermathena* 55 (1940), 49, Daviault (1981) 43 and n. 3). Whether these would have been known to Jerome is uncertain. *Togatae* were being written-though apparently only for recitation—at least up to the time of Juvenal (Juv., 1.3). Jerome shows an acquaintance with Terence: perhaps there was a stepmother in a missing play of Terence, though it seems unlikely that she was wicked.

[114] So Tommaso Guardi, *Titinio e Atta Fabula Togata* (Milan: 1985) ad loc.

is resolved at the end of the play.[115] In the second piece, the *Privigna*, occur the lines "nam quid ego feci te advorsum aut patrem meum/ quem pauperetis ambo vestris sumptibus?" ("for what have I done to hurt you or my father that the two of you should impoverish me with your extravagant spending?") The speaker, who must be male (cf. the masculine 'quem'), appears to be upbraiding someone, together with his father, for squandering the family wealth, thus depriving the son of his inheritance. Though the plot cannot be reconstructed with any certainty, the following is a possible scenario: the speaker's complaint is addressed to his stepmother, who is lavishly spending the wealth of her newly acquired husband; the *privigna* of the play's title is the stepmother's daughter by a previous union, i.e. the father's stepdaughter; possibly there was a romantic interest, as in Menander's *Phasma*, between the young man and his stepsister.[116] Afranius (late 2nd century BC) also wrote a *Privignus*, though this seems to concern a stepfather (we do not know if there was also a stepmother involved). His *Divortium*, which centres on a divorce between a young couple initiated by the girl's father, contained a stepmother, and by her description she was a nasty one. Presumably she was the girl's stepmother and incited the father to have his daughter divorce her husband (maybe, like Sassia, she had eyes on the stepson-in-law). The lines describing the stepmother run "mulier, novercae nomen huc adde impium;/ spurca gingivast, gannit hau dici potest" ("a woman, add to this the impious name of stepmother;/ she has a foul gum, she barks indescribably") If this is a physical description of the woman, she is pictured as having a foul gum and barking or howling like a dog—perhaps the idea is that her mouth is set in a snarl, showing her gums. But *spurca* ('foul') has figurative connotations, and coupled with *impium* ('impious') no doubt implies a moral condemnation of some kind. It is just possible that this *noverca* is of the amorous kind. *Gingiva* ('gum') might be a unique use of the word by synecdoche for 'mouth', the reference being to *fellatio*. Certainly *gannire* ('to howl') and *gannitus* ('howling') can be used in an

[115] Daviault (1981) 109.

[116] If, on the other hand, the woman is his own mother, then the complaint is more pointed: what have I done to my parents that they should treat me in a way that is inappropriate? If this is the case, he must be the product of a second marriage on the part of his mother, and the *privigna* of the play's title would be the daughter of either his father or his mother by a previous union. She is unlikely to be his full sister, since in that case he would be indignant on behalf of them both, not just on his own behalf.

erotic context.[117] Whatever the implication of the lines, this is the first definite example of a stepmother who is an unpleasant character.

The other genre mentioned by Jerome is the Mime. In the *Belonistria* of Laberius (mid-1st century), a stepmother is in love with her stepson. If three lines which are attributed by some scholars[118] to this mime do in fact belong there, it seems that the stepmother was portrayed as a wicked one. The lines in question are "uxorem tuam/ et meam novercam consectari lapidibus/ a populo video" ("I see your wife and my stepmother attacked by the people with stones"). Public stoning was a common form of popular informal justice[119] (it was not one of the punishments enshrined in law): it might have been inflicted in this case on a stepmother who seduced her stepson, but it is possible that she was also a poisoner who attempted to murder her husband in order to rid herself of him and get her hands on his son. Perhaps she was betrayed by the stepson to the husband and punished.[120]

Finally, there is the Atellan Farce of Pomponius, *Praeco Posterior*, in which a young man, in love with his young stepmother, tricks her into becoming alienated from his elderly father by getting a *praeco* ('herald') to announce publicly some notice to the coheirs (of which the stepmother is one) presumably detrimental to their inheritance propects.[121] Here we have a combination of the themes of the 'amorous stepmother' (though it is the son who is in love with the stepmother) and the wife who aims at her husband's inheritance, though whether she had it in mind to poison her stepson, or get him disinherited, in order to obtain his share of the inheritance as well for herself, is uncertain.

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[117] E.g. Juv., 6.64, Apul., *Met.* 10.21. In this case 'spurca' would mean literally filthy (for the belief that a person who practised *fellatio* had an unclean mouth/ breath cf. Martial, 7.95.15., 1.83 with Peter Howell, *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial* (London: 1980) ad loc.

[118] E.g. Beare (1964) 156; contrast Mario Bonaria, *Romani Mimi* (Rome: 1965), who lists them as 'fragmenta certa ex incertis fabulis' ('authentic fragments from uncertain plays').

[119] The best discussion of stoning is Detlev Fehling, *Ethologische Überlegungen auf dem Gebiet der Altertumskunde*, *Zetemata* monograph 61 (Munich: 1974) 59–102.

[120] This is the suggestion of Beare (1964) 156, who compares the Oxyrhynchus Mime of the 2nd century AD which affords evidence that the themes of murder and of wifely immorality were found in this genre. (In the Oxyrhynchus text, the woman in question is an adulteress and poisoner, though it is a slave, rather than a stepson, who is the object of her amorous attentions).

[121] See Paulus Frassinetti, *Atellanae Fabulae* (Rome: 1967) 107.

Before the development of the declamation, the stepmother was a familiar character on the Roman stage. Most of the plays we have discussed, however, dealt with the 'amorous' stepmother situation; in other cases the recipient of stepmotherly malevolence is a stepdaughter. The stock *noverca venefica* of the declamation may have appeared, but this is purely conjectural.

Conclusion

There is no unambiguous evidence for the stepmother theme in the Greek rhetoric inherited by the Romans: even if it did occur there, it does not seem to have been sufficiently prominent to explain the popularity of the *saeva noverca* in the Roman declamation. Stepfamily relations were treated in the popular forms of Roman drama, though the motif of the *noverca venefica*—the most common manifestation of the stepmother in the declamation—is not much in evidence there.[122] The influence of folktale, too, should not be underestimated: it is quite conceivable that folk stories about poisoning stepmothers were current in the 1st century BC.[123] Finally, it must be considered to what extent the declamatory theme of the evil *noverca*, like the tyrants and the pirate chief, was related to real life experience.[124] It is to this question that I will turn in the following chapter.

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[122] Individual examples of murderous stepmothers would have been familiar from Latin versions of Greek tragedies e.g. Ennius' *Medea Exul* and possibly the *Athamas* of Ennius and the *Athamas* and *Chrysippus* of Accius.

[123] Cf. Scobie (1983) 21–30. Note too that Apuleius' stepmother story (discussed above), though clearly showing the influence of the declamation, also contains many folktale elements.

[124] On the relationship of declamatory themes, including the poisoning stepmother, to real life, see N. Deratani, "Le réalisme dans les declamationes", *RPh* 55 (1929), 185f., who points out that Seneca (*De ira* 2.9.2) regarded Ovid's list of subverted family relationships (*Met.* 1.144ff.: discussed earlier in this chapter) as a reflection of some of the vices of his own day. Deratani's conclusion is supported by E. Migliario, "Luoghi retorici e realtà sociale nell'opera di Seneca il Vecchio", *Athenaeum* n.s. 67 (1989), 525–49, who discusses themes such as rich/poor, slaves/masters and violence in Seneca's *Controversiae* and concludes that these reflect social issues current in Seneca's day.

CHAPTER FIVE

STEPMOTHERS IN ROMAN LIFE

A. *Existence of Stepmothers in Rome*

The Roman obsession with wicked stepmothers, attested especially in the literature of the late republic and early empire, suggests some basis in real life. Certainly, stepmothers charged with the upbringing of stepchildren must have been common among the Roman upper classes, whether as a result of the death of the first wife, or of divorce, given that in the latter case, custody of the children seems to have been normally with the male parent.[1] Abundant evident exists for the remarriage of fathers, in other words, the circumstances necessary for the creation of a stepmother. In the consular list for the years 80–50BC, Bradley[2] finds 8 definite and 12 probable cases of men who married at least twice, i.e. 39% of the 51 consuls for whom personal information is available: 12 of these had children from a previous marriage, giving a total of 17 stepmothers.[3] Similarly Humbert, in his thorough examination of the subject of remarriage, discusses 16 leading men and their families from Sulla to Nero who were married a total of 46 times between them (these include Sulla, Pompey and Mark Antony, all of whom had 5 wives, as well as Caligula and Claudius who had 4 wives each).[4] Although cases of multiple marriage may have been exceptional, it is likely that a significant percentage of upper class Romans of both sexes married more than once. Bradley goes so far as to suggest that "many,

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[1] Cf. for instance Gardner (1986) 146–7, Bradley (1991b) 89–90, Treggiari (1991b) 39–40.

[2] (1991a) 158ff.

[3] Due to frequent remarriage, some gave their children more than one stepmother (four in the case of Sulla and two each in the cases of Pompey and Julius Caesar). The other nine are Ap. Claudius Pulcher, D. Junius Brutus, L. Licinius Lucullus, L. Gellius Poplicola, Q. Hortensius, M. Tullius Cicero, Valerius Messala Niger, M. Calpurnius Bibulus and L. Marcius Philippus. Of the 17 stepmothers only 4 are in Bradley's 'probable' category. Cf. Humbert (1972) 85, who finds 15 men among the consuls for 80–30BC definitely known to have remarried.

[4] (1972) 80ff.: the list could easily be extended, as Humbert admits, e.g. he does not include Julius Caesar or Agrippa, both married three times.

perhaps most, men and women would anticipate at least two marriages in the course of their adulthood, the birth of children in each marriage, and step-parental association with other children".[5] Moreover, the evidence from inscriptions and literary sources (though more limited) indicates that frequent remarriage was not confined to the upper echelons of society.[6]

Given the likelihood that custodial stepmothers were a common phenomenon in Rome, we can explore the connection, if any, between the stock literary and rhetorical figure of the *saeva noverca* and everyday reality. This connection might be direct, i.e. the literary portrait is based on actual examples of stepmotherly malevolence, or else stepfamily conflicts, real or potential, may have been influential in a less direct way in the creation of the stereotype.

B. *The 'Amorous Stepmother'*

I begin with the 'amorous stepmother'. The type of situation envisaged in the Roman declamation[7] and in poetic texts (e.g. Catullus 64.401–2)[8] involves an elderly husband whose son is coeval with the

[5] (1991a) 162. On the frequency of divorce and remarriage among the elite, see also Saller (1991) 37. Treggiari (1991b) 44–6, (also (1991a) 473–82), thinks that divorce was not as frequent in general as the number of cases among the leading politicians might suggest. Even so, the number of stepmothers created through death (e.g. in childbirth) as well as divorce would not have been inconsiderable. Also, the Augustan marriage laws encouraging remarriage could not have been entirely without effect.

[6] See Humbert (1972) 87ff.

[7] E.g. Calp., *Decl.* 22 (spoken by the father) "ego primus in domo mea, fateor, erravi, qui uxorem duxi senex, cum iam esset in domo filius et quidem iuvenis" ("it was I who first went wrong, I admit, in taking a wife in my old age, when I already had in my house a son and a young adult at that"); Sen., *Con.* fr. 1 is about a father who caught his wife and her stepson in adultery and killed them: he refers to his 'senilem manum' (aged hand'); Sen., *Con.* 6.7. is based on the Antiochus and Stratonice story, but since the father gives the wife to his son, again the wife and son may be assumed to be close in age.

[8] This passage has been variously interpreted. Catullus says that the father desires his son's death in order to enjoy unencumbered a young wife, described as *noverca* ("optavit genitor primaevi funera nati,/ liber ut innuptae [uti nuptae?] poteretur flore novercae "the father longed for the death of his young son,/ so that he could be free to possess the bloom of an unwed (wed?) stepmother"). Although reference has been seen to the situation described in Cic., *Clu.* 27 and Sall., *Cat.* 15 (on which see ch. 1, n. 43), the sexual force of 'poteretur flore'('possess the bloom'), together with the reference to the son's youth (*primaevus* = in the prime of youth) suggest an 'amorous stepmother' situation where the stepson is close in age to the stepmother: see Watson (1984), 114–6.

stepmother. Since in Rome the bridegroom, as in Athens, was normally older than his bride, and since second marriages often produced offspring (i.e. the bride was of childbearing age[9]), these circumstances may not have been unusual.[10] On the other hand, a sexual union between stepson and stepmother was in Rome (as distinct from classical Athens) not merely adulterous but incestuous.[11] This being so, such affairs might be expected, in theory, to have been relatively uncommon; if they existed, however, they would have attracted notice.

A famous instance from the Republic involved L. Gellius Poplicola, consul in 72BC and censor in 70, who accused his son of *stuprum* ('illicit sex') with his stepmother before a family tribunal attended by most of the senate. Given the opportunity to defend himself against this charge (as well as one of attempted parricide) the son, however, succeeded in convincing his father of his innocence.[12] The guilt of the stepson is more certain in a case from the time of Hadrian (*Digest* 48.9.5). A father killed his son when the latter was having an affair with his stepmother; the father, however, was sentenced to exile by the emperor for abusing his *patria potestas* ('father's authority'). The only other example I have discovered, from a later period, concerns the scandal surrounding the deaths of Constantine's wife Fausta, and her stepson Crispus, the emperor's son by an earlier relationship.[13]

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[9] Though not necessarily a virgin: remarriage among women seems to have been more frequent than among men and a second wife would often have been previously married herself.

[10] Bradley (1991b) 161, 167–8, makes the point that stepmothers could be coevals of stepchildren or even younger, as in the case of Cicero's second wife. Cf also Treggiari (1991a) 401.

[11] *Incestum* ('incest'), which became an offence under the Augustan marriage legislation, included both extra-marital sexual relationships between endogamous couples (i.e. couples related by family ties who were legally debarred from marrying each other—this included steprelations), as well as marriages illegally contracted between such couples. See A. Guarino, "Studi sull' 'incestum'", *ZRG* 63 (1943), 223f., Gardner (1986) 126, Treggiari (1991a) 281, Mette-Dittmann (1991) 43f., 48.

[12] The son has often been identified with Catullus' rival-in-love Gellius, whom he accused of incest with various family members including his mother. But as demonstrated by Timothy P. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet and other Roman Essays*, (Leicester: 1974) 119–29, Catullus' Gellius (usually identified as the consul of 36BC and described by the poet as a young man) is unlikely to have been the son of the censor: since the latter was praetor as early as 94BC, this would make Gellius around 60 years younger than his father, which, in view of the fact that he was the product of the father's first marriage, is unacceptable. The Gellius who features in Catullus was probably the grandson of the censor and the son or perhaps the nephew of the Gellius accused of incest with his *noverca*.

[13] There is dispute over Crispus' legitimacy: though the sources call Crispus' mother

One explanation that was offered in order to link the deaths was a Phaedra-like story that Crispus had been poisoned after a false accusation by his stepmother, who was later executed. The story is, however, unlikely to be true.[14]

Apart from the cases just cited, literature offers more oblique evidence that sexual relations between stepmother and stepson were not unknown in real life. It is, for instance, significant that the forms of drama which were most peculiarly Roman/Italian and which reflected everyday situations, contained plots revolving around a stepfamily, in some cases centering on the love of a stepmother for her stepson or vice versa. The *togata* of Afranius entitled *Divortium* featured an unsavoury stepmother who might also have been an amorous one. In the *Belonistria* of Laberius appeared a stepmother in love with her stepson, and around 50 years earlier, in Pomponius' Atellan farce, the *Praeco Posterior*, a stepson was portrayed as in love with the young wife of his elderly father.[15] A real-life scenario may underlie a poem of Martial in which the poet accuses a man, whom he calls Gallus, of incest with his stepmother.[16] While Gallus' father was still alive, a rumour arose that the relationship between Gallus and his father's second wife was not that of stepson/stepmother (in other words, that they were having an affair). During the father's lifetime, there was no way of proving this, but now that the father has died and the *noverca* continues to live in the house, everyone's suspicions have been confirmed. The closing words of the poem (lines 7–8 ". . . . quae non desinit esse/ post patrem, numquam, Galle, noverca fuit" (". . . . she

παλλακή ('concubine'), she may have been a wife. It has been suggested (e.g. by J. Rougé, "Fausta, femme de Constantin: criminelle ou victime", *Cahiers d'histoire* 25 (1980), 6 that the use of the title παλλακή for the first wife derived from the jealousy of the second wife Fausta.

[14] For the story, see Zon., *Epit.* 13.2.38–41. Apart from the resemblance to the Phaedra myth (though this is not a reason in itself for branding the story as spurious), there is the fact that Crispus suffered a *damnatio memoriae* along with Fausta: if she was executed because her accusation was found to be false, why did his father not reinstate Crispus' reputation posthumously? See Pohlsander (1984), 103–4.

[15] For discussion of all these texts, see chapter 4.

[16] The poem (4.16) is addressed to Gallus. There are three possibilities 1) the whole thing might be a complete fiction 2) Gallus might stand for a specific individual 3) Martial might not have one person in mind but might be thinking of a situation known to him from real-life. Possibility 1) seems the least likely, given that Martial attacks real vices if not real people (cf. Mart. 10.33.10 'parcere personis, dicere de vitiis). John P. Sullivan, *Martial: the unexpected classic* (Cambridge: 1991) 64 suggests, quite rightly, that the disclaimer has to be viewed in the tradition of such apologies and that at least on some occasions Martial had a real person in mind.

who does not cease to be a stepmother after the father ['s death], never *was* a stepmother, Gallus") might simply mean that in these particular circumstances, i.e. where there had been talk prior to the husband's death, the widow could have put a stop to such speculation by instant departure.[17] On the other hand, perhaps Martial is reflecting a commonly-held view that it was improper for a young widow with a grown stepson to remain in her husband's house:[18] the notion of stepmother and stepson continuing to live together without the husband as common link between them may have suggested to the Roman mind a degree of harmony so unthinkable that it must inevitably arouse suspicion.

The extent to which the examples from literature just discussed provide testimony to real-life behaviour must remain a matter for conjecture. Nevertheless, they demonstrate at the very least that the presence in a household of a stepmother along with a grown stepson was recognised as potentially hazardous, even if it did not often result in actual sexual misdemeanours.

To summarise, there is little concrete evidence that the 'amorous stepmother' stereotype exploited in the declamation and elsewhere has a basis in factual reality. It may, however, be a reflection of the perceived danger in the common everyday situation where a father, remarrying, choses a woman who is closer in age to her stepson than to himself. This threatening circumstance is, on the other hand, presented in a distorted form, since it is the stereotypic stepmother, rather than the stepson, who is invariably depicted as the one at fault. It is significant in this connection that in two of the historical examples discussed above, it was the stepson who was accused of incest rather than the stepmother. On the stage, too, the stepson was sometimes portrayed as in love with his stepmother, or else the relationship was one of mutual love.[19]

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[17] Martial's words 'non desinit esse' are not, of course, to be taken literally: a stepmother does not stop being a stepmother once the husband has died: this is shown by the ban on marriage between stepmother and stepson *after* the husband's death (or divorce). He means "she who does not stop living in the house and acting a stepmother's part".

[18] Bearing in mind that, since marriage was legally forbidden between steprelations (see above note 11), there was no chance that such a couple could marry after the death of the husband—if they did, they were liable to prosecution for incest.

[19] And in the case of Catull., 64. 401f. the father and son appear to be rivals in love; also it is the father who harbours murderous intentions against the son.

C. *The Malevolent Stepmother*

1. *Murderous stepmothers*

The most frequent manifestation of stepmotherly malevolence, according to the declamatory stereotype of the *saeva noverca*, is the removal of an unwanted stepson by poisoning. Although it is difficult to find cases in real life where a stepmother is indisputably, or even probably, guilty of murder, there is evidence that stepmothers were at least suspected of such behaviour. This is seen in the following tomb inscription (*CIL* 12.810):

D. M.
L. Hostili . .
Silvani
ann XXIIII . . .
mater fil piissim
misera et in luctu
aeternali benefici
o novercae

to the departed spirit
of Lucius Hostilius
Silvanus
aged 24 years. . . .
his mother [set this up] for her most dutiful son,
wretched and suffering grief
everlasting thanks to
his stepmother.

Forcellini suggested that *beneficio* ('thanks to') is a vulgar spelling for *veneficio* ('through poisoning [at the hands of]'), an interpretation that is almost too good to be true; it is in any case unnecessary, since in later Latin *beneficio* is used regularly as a preposition followed by the genitive and may sometimes, like the English 'thanks to', have a derogatory sense ('through the fault of').[20] Here, then, is a mother who has set up a tomb for her son in the belief that he has been

[20] Humbert (1972) 200 n. 39, accepts *veneficio* ; he is followed by Noy (1991), 358 n. 13, on the grounds that *beneficio* (= 'through the favour of') would in this context have to be used sarcastically. But although this use would certainly have been sarcastic in origin, *beneficio* + genitive seems to have become simply an equivalent for 'propter' ('on account of') from the mid first century AD on. For other examples of *beneficio* with a derogatory meaning cf. [Quint.], *Decl.* 1.1 'beneficio caecitatis', Ulp., *Dig.* 39.2.40.1 'beneficio eius contingit', 47.2.46 'beneficio furis', *Pass. perp.* 3 'illos tabescere videram mei beneficio'; see *TLL* 1888 53ff. s.v. *beneficium*.

murdered by his stepmother. The accusation might well have been true; it is equally possible, however, that circumstantial evidence was turned against the stepmother because of an underlying prejudice against *novercae*: the son contracted an illness involving the alimentary system, during which he was attended, and given food and drink, by his stepmother;[21] when he died, she was suspected of poisoning him.[22] In this case, given that it is the mother who makes the accusation, an additional factor is at work, namely resentment on the part of the mother that another woman has charge of her son, a feeling which would make her all the more ready to believe ill of the stepmother.[23]

The other[24] real-life stepmother accused of murder was Livia, the wife of Augustus. A hostile tradition, followed most notably by Tacitus, casts Livia in the rôle of the *noverca venefica*. This is a clear case of a stepmother falling victim to the literary stereotype: I shall discuss Tacitus' portrayal of Livia more fully in the next chapter.

Whereas Livia as wicked stepmother is largely a literary creation, it is not so easy to dismiss as fiction the portrait in our sources of Agrippina the Younger, who obtained the principate for her son Nero at the expense of her stepson Britannicus.[25] Although she did

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[21] For the stepmother to have access to the stepson (who must be unmarried still: otherwise his wife would have set up the inscription), it is probable that he was living with her and his father after the divorce of his parents.

[22] Before autopsies, when there was no sure way of distinguishing between death by poison and death caused by an intestinal illness, many innocent persons must have been accused of murder; likewise many poisoners must have gone unsuspected. Given the prejudice against stepmothers, the death of a stepson due to natural causes must have caused many a stepmother sleepless nights!

[23] Why did the father not bury the son? He might have been dead himself, in which case the stepmother would not have had any obvious motivation for killing her stepson, given that privignicide—in fiction at any rate—is undertaken with a view to the stepmother or her child becoming her husband's heir. Perhaps the father was still alive, but had refused the son burial, and that is why the mother had to bury him: such a refusal would have reinforced her prejudice against the stepmother who, she thought, had turned the father against his son.

[24] From a later period, there is also Constantine's wife Fausta, whom we mentioned earlier in connection with the 'amorous' stepmother. Even if the Phaedra-type story is untrue, she may have got her stepson accused of a crime and executed because he stood in the way of her own sons' chances: see Pohlsander (1984), 104. A further case is that of Messalina. Perhaps in order to highlight his portrayal of Agrippina, Tacitus does not present her as a stepmother, yet she in fact behaved in a stepmotherly fashion towards her stepdaughter: see below n. 30.

[25] But Tacitus is influenced by the stereotype in his portrayal of Agrippina as well, so that he presents the facts in such a way as to make her appear as stepmotherly as possible. See next chapter for discussion.

not murder her stepson, she comes closest in other respects to the literary paradigm.[26]

Agrippina's ruthlessness in promoting her son's interests even before she became a stepmother equipped her well to embark on her career as *saeva noverca*.[27] After the death of her first husband Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, the father of Nero, Agrippina next married the wealthy and childless C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus, who died some time later, having named Agrippina and Nero as his heirs: rumours circulated that she had poisoned him.[28] Although Agrippina's first union, when she was thirteen years old, had been arranged for her by Tiberius, by the time of this second marriage she was in her mid-twenties and *sui iuris* ('under her own jurisdiction', i.e. legally independent); her parents and brothers were dead, her only male relative her uncle Claudius. It is likely then that she had employed her own formidable powers of persuasion to convince Passienus to divorce his first wife—her own sister-in-law Domitia—and to marry her.[29]

It was at Agrippina's third wedding, to her uncle, the emperor Claudius, that she became a stepmother.[30] Her situation now paral-

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[26] On Agrippina, see Kornemann (1942) 221–51.

[27] The ruthlessness and ambition displayed by Agrippina in promoting the interests of her only son is commonly found among Roman mothers: see Dixon (1988) ch. 7. In the case of Agrippina, moreover, her ambitions for Nero were inextricably linked with an extraordinarily strong lust for power in her own right (cf. most recently Bauman (1992) 179).

[28] For the rumour see Schol. Juv., 4.81. It is likely to be based on the coincidence of Passienus' death with Claudius becoming available for remarriage; but Passienus probably died the year before Messalina. See Syme (1958) 328 n. 12, Griffin (1984) 28. Bauman (1992) 179, however, accepts the rumour as true.

[29] Once she had acquired him as husband, she would have had no difficulty in persuading him to make a will in her favour, as he had no close relatives who might have a prior claim (he had no children by Domitia and his only brother, Passienus Rufus, was probably dead: *RE* 2098.52–8). Agrippina had already attempted useful alliances: with Galba, whom she was unable to persuade, and prior to this, in late 39, she had been exiled by her brother Caligula on a charge of treason and adultery with the widower of their sister Drusilla, Aemilius Lepidus (she was recalled by Claudius when he became emperor in 41): if the charge was true, Agrippina's aim might have been to remove Caligula and put Lepidus on the throne as caretaker until Nero came of age (see Bauman (1992) 164).

[30] Her stepchildren were Britannicus and Octavia, children of Messalina, Claudius' third wife, and Claudia Antonia, daughter of his second wife Aelia Paetina. The last mentioned was married already (having suffered stepmotherly treatment at the hands of her previous stepmother Messalina, who got rid of her fiancé, the powerful Pompeius Magnus, replacing him with the less threatening Faustus Sulla, Messalina's half-brother: see Bauman (1992) 172). The other two stepchildren were still at home:

leled closely that of the stepmothers of myth: she was the wife of a ruler whose son by an earlier union (Britannicus) stood in the way of her ambitions for her own son to attain the throne. Unlike the stepmothers of fiction, however, Agrippina had begun her efforts on behalf of her son prior to the marriage.[31] These involved two main objectives: first, Agrippina must become Claudius' wife, a task made difficult by the fact that such a union would be legally incestuous, and second, she must encourage Nero's popularity over that of Britannicus.

All three major sources agree that Agrippina shamelessly exploited her family relationship with Claudius to gain access to the emperor and, after the death of his wife Messalina, to seduce him.[32] She also cultivated the influential Pallas to support her claims.[33] Once Claudius was determined on the marriage, its illegality had to be dealt with. For this purpose the censor Lucius Vitellius was employed, his address to the senate being so persuasive that Claudius found himself urged by both senatorial and popular consent to agree to the marriage and to nullify its incestuous nature by special senatorial decree.[34]

Even before her marriage to Claudius, Agrippina seems to have pushed the claims of her own son over those of Messalina's son Britannicus. According to Tacitus,[35] Nero received greater applause than Britannicus at the Secular Games held by Claudius, partly because he was the only surviving male descendant of Germanicus and partly because pity was felt for Agrippina due to her persecution by Messalina. A story about a snake, of which the three major sources

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Britannicus was 8, over three years younger than Nero. The two children of his first wife Urgulanilla had died in childhood.

[31] In myth and fiction this was not possible because the child on whose behalf the stepmother plots is always her child from the current marriage, not a previous one.

[32] Tac., *Ann.* 12.3, Suet., *Claud.* 26, Dio Cass., 62.11.4, 61. Levick (1990) 69–70, argues that from Claudius' viewpoint the marriage was politically sound: his position would be enhanced by a union with the last daughter of the popular Germanicus and a direct descendant of Augustus. The degree to which Claudius required persuading to the match need not, however, detract from the ruthlessness of Agrippina's ambitions.

[33] Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.1–2) says that when the question of a new wife for Claudius was discussed between Claudius and his freedmen, Agrippina's cause was argued by Pallas whose support, according to Tacitus, was gained through sexual favours. In Dio's version (61.31.8), Claudius' freedmen all support the marriage of Agrippina and the subsequent promotion of her son because they feared the vengeance of Britannicus whose mother they had destroyed.

[34] Tac., *Ann.* 12.5–7.

[35] *Ann.* 11.11–12.

give different versions, may reflect propaganda on the part of Agrippina: in the version given by Suetonius, the omen of the snake is linked with an alleged assassination attempt on the part of Messalina.[36] Agrippina also strengthened Nero's position by securing his betrothal to Claudius' daughter Octavia:[37] here too she was aided by Vitellius, who used his censorial powers to get Octavia's fiancé, L. Junius Silanus, out of the running.[38]

Once she became the wife of Claudius, the new stepmother set about attaining her ambitions not by poisoning her stepson (although if even some of the stories are true, she was not averse to murder in other cases, including, it is likely, Claudius himself),[39] but by bringing it about that her son Nero would succeed his stepfather as sole heir. To achieve this, she worked both to strengthen the claims of her own son and to ensure that those of Britannicus would stand no chance. First, by using her own considerable influence over her husband, as well as that of her lover Pallas, she got Nero adopted by

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[36] Suetonius (*Nero* 6.4) says Messalina sent assassins against Nero, who were repelled when a snake darted out from beneath his pillow: Agrippina got Nero to wear the skin in a bracelet. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 11.11.3), snakes had ominously guarded the cradle of the infant Nero: compare the story in Dio in which a snake skin fortuitously found round Nero's neck was interpreted as meaning he would get the throne from an old man because old snakes slough their skin. Bauman (1992) 264 n. 58, thinks the story of the assassination attempt is a result of the sources' inability to find evidence that Messalina attacked Agrippina, but perhaps the story derives from a campaign of propaganda against Messalina on the part of Agrippina herself. If her memoirs are to be dated to this period (Griffin (1984) 23), she would have used them for this purpose, relating in them the snake story in some form; more importantly they would have provided a suitable vehicle for reminding readers of Nero's descent from the ever popular Germanicus.

[37] Levick (1990) 71 points out that a good precedent existed for the heir marrying the daughter of the Princeps in the case of Julia the Elder's marriages to Marcellus and Tiberius.

[38] Vitellius got Silanus expelled from the Senate on a false charge of incest with his sister: Claudius cancelled the engagement, and Silanus afterwards committed suicide. Tacitus, relating the incident (*Ann.* 12.4.1), says that Vitellius' action was designed to court Agrippina's favour. Ehrhardt (1977) 59–61, 67–70 demonstrates how Silanus, before the coming of Agrippina, would have become Claudius' heir/caretaker for Britannicus had Claudius died before his son grew up.

[39] On Claudius' death, see below, n. 44. Other alleged victims of Agrippina include Passienus and Statilius Taurus (Tac., *Ann.* 12.59), in both cases for their wealth (cf. Dio's remark (61.32.3) that in order to amass wealth for her son, she was accustomed to cultivate the wealthy and then murder them), and several females whom she saw as standing in the way of her ambitions: Lollia Paulina, her former rival for the hand of Claudius, whom she got exiled and then forced to commit suicide (Tac., *Ann.* 12.22), Calpurnia, whom she had banished because Claudius had admired her beauty (Tac., *Ann.* 12.22.3) and Messalina's mother Domitia Lepida, Nero's aunt, executed on charges instigated by Agrippina when she seemed to have too much

Claudius.[40] As Claudius' adopted son, Nero, who was three years older than Britannicus, might have a technical, if not a moral, claim to the succession.[41] His image appeared on coins; he assumed the *toga virilis* ('toga of manhood') at the premature age of thirteen and was awarded various honours including a consulship to be held when he turned 19.[42] Towards Britannicus, by contrast, Agrippina seems to have acted the part of the cruel stepmother. According to Dio, she kept the boy a virtual prisoner, not letting even his father see him, and giving out publicly that he was insane and epileptic,[43] presumably to explain his lack of appearances before the people, a situation which was all the more noticeable because his stepbrother Nero was constantly before the public gaze and enjoyed great popularity. The boy's tutors were replaced with minions of her chosing (contrast Nero, who had the services of Seneca, recalled from exile). When Claudius died suddenly from a stomach ailment, it was rumoured that Agrippina was responsible.[44] Given that Britannicus was approaching his thirteenth birthday, the age at which Nero had assumed the *toga virilis*, it is certainly likely that Claudius was thinking of the welfare of his son by blood; he may well have named him coheir with Nero in his will.[45] Whether or not Agrippina met such an emergency by disposing of her husband before he could reinstate Britannicus, at any rate when he died she seized the opportunity to have Nero declared emperor without delay. She had taken the precaution of

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influence over with her nephew (Tac., *Ann.* 12.64.3: see Martin (1981) 159, Levick (1990) 76, pointing out that as grandmother of Britannicus she might have supported his cause over Nero's).

[40] Pallas is said to have urged Claudius to adopt Nero as protector for Britannicus (Tac., *Ann.* 12.25). Levick (1990) 72 suggests that Claudius' plan was to have joint heirs on the analogy of e.g. Tiberius and Drusus, in which case he would not have needed much persuasion to adopt Nero.

[41] Although there was no legal bar to a man adopting a son when he already had one of his own, it attracted great disapprobation: see Corbier (1991) 66.

[42] See Levick (1990) 72–4 Bauman (1992) 180–1 for details.

[43] Dio Cass., 61.32.5–6, 33.10. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.26.2) he may have been intelligent: at any rate, the matter was never put to the test.

[44] The rumour that Claudius was poisoned started early (cf. [Sen.], *Octavia* 164f. (implicating Agrippina), Plin., *Nat.* 2.92). The famous story that Agrippina employed a poisoned mushroom is referred to by Mart., 1.20.4., Juv., 5.147, 6.620f., Tac., *Ann.* 12.66–7, and Dio Cass., 61.34.2f. Unlike most of the sources, who accept the story as true, Suetonius (*Claud.* 44.2–6) is non-commital. Modern scholarly opinion is divided on whether or not Agrippina did in fact murder her husband: see Bauman (1992) 266 n. 96 for bibliography.

[45] Cf. Dio Cass., 61.34.1–2, Levick (1990) 78. The suppression of the will might suggest this: see further below.

getting one of her chief supporters, Burrus, made Prefect of the Guard; she had also had the foresight to remove from the guard any soldiers showing favour to Britannicus. Moreover, Claudius' will was suppressed, presumably because mention of Britannicus' name would have been detrimental to the position of Nero.[46]

Having obtained the supreme power for her son, Agrippina appears to have ceased her stepmotherly activities.[47] It was Nero who eventually poisoned Britannicus, fearing him as a rival: ironically, after her influence over Nero had begun to wane, Agrippina had tried to alarm her son by affecting to support Britannicus as Claudius' rightful heir.[48] After the murder of Britannicus, she also sided with her stepdaughter Octavia, Nero's estranged wife.[49]

2. *Other forms of malevolence: disinherison of the stepchild in favour of the stepmother*

In addition to the removal of a stepson in the interests of a stepmother's own child, the Declamations sometimes portray other scenarios. For example in [Quintil.] *Decl.* 2, a stepmother successfully brings a false accusation of attempted parricide against her stepson: her husband disinherits his son and names the stepmother as heir instead.[50] Although the theme of the false accusation smacks of fiction, the disinheritance of the son in favour of the second wife reflects a real-life situation,[51] though one that probably occurred infrequently, for reasons which will become clear.

The best-known example comes from Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 6.33). In typically self-congratulatory fashion, he describes his successful

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[46] On Claudius' will, see discussion in chapter 6.

[47] Though she seems to have been responsible for the poisoning of M. Junius Silanus, the brother of Octavia's former fiancé Silanus, whom Agrippina had removed: the murder was probably motivated not just through fear that he would take revenge but because he was a potential rival for Nero. See Bauman (1992) 191.

[48] Tac., *Ann.* 13.14.2–3, Griffin (1984) 73–4, Bauman (1992) 195.

[49] Tac., *Ann.* 13.18.2.

[50] Cf. Sen., *Con.* 2.6.3, Quint., *Decl.* 338. In Sen., *Con.* 7.1, a more novel means of disposing of the stepson is to get him convicted of parricide and condemned to death.

[51] Note the contrast with Athens: there a woman could not under any circumstances inherit from her husband; in Rome, this was possible under certain conditions (see further below), thus the stereotypical stepmother in Roman literature is sometimes represented as desiring the inheritance for herself, rather than for her child.

advocacy of Attia Viriola, who brought a case under the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will')[52] when her aged father died, having disinherited his daughter[53] in favour of a second wife shortly after remarrying. The stepmother was defeated, and the estate was awarded to the daughter.[54]

Now there were, in theory, good reasons why a stepmother who desired the whole of her husband's estate might attempt to remove the stepchild first through disinherison. For a father's will to be legally valid, all his children, being *sui heredes*,[55] must be instituted heirs and left at least a quarter of the estate,[56] unless specifically disinherited. Although it was normal practice in wills for wives either to be made coheir with the testator's children or, more commonly, to receive a legacy of some kind,[57] the evidence indicates that the wife,

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[52] The *querela inofficiosi testamenti* was a suit which could be brought by someone having the right to an inheritance under the rules of intestate succession (usually limited to children, parents, brothers and sisters of the deceased) and who had been treated unjustly in a will e.g. disinherited for no good reason: see Gardner (1986) 183, 202 n. 39 for further references.

[53] Note that the stepchild is a daughter: in the Roman literary/rhetorical stereotype, the stepchild is always male. One reason for this is that the stepmother of fiction normally desires the inheritance on behalf of her own child of the marriage, rather than herself: assuming her own child is male, if the stepchild were female, she would pose no threat to the stepmother's own child, because it was customary for sons to be bequeathed a greater share than daughters: see Champlin (1991) 114ff. (Although a son and stepdaughter would have equal claims in the event of intestacy, it is probable that most people who had property to leave made a will (J. Crook, "Intestacy in Roman Society", *PCPhS* 19 (1973), 38–44, Champlin (1991) 63).

[54] We know of another case from the *Codex* of Justinian 3.28.22 where a stepdaughter was disinherited at the expense of a man's wife, presumably her stepmother: see Gardner (1986) 189.

[55] The term refers to those in a man's *potestas* ('jurisdiction, control') who became legally independent ('*sui iuris*') on his death, and who automatically had first place in the line of intestate succession. A wife did not come into this category unless married *cum manu* (lit. 'with the hand', i.e. under the legal authority of her husband), a procedure that had virtually died out by the end of the Republic (the other form of marriage, *sine manu* (lit. 'without the hand/legal control'), meant that the wife remained in the *potestas* of her father, and thus had no direct intestate claim on her husband's estate); even after modifications that began from the time of the late republic, a wife was low down in the list of intestate heirs, after children, agnates (i.e. all those descended from a common male ancestor) and cognates (i.e. relatives to the sixth degree).

[56] The lex Falcidia of 40BC specified that the heir must receive 1/4; up to 3/4 could be left to others as legacies, though in practice the heir or heirs normally received the bulk of the estate (Champlin (1991) 54), and in any case the provision regarding legatees would not be of benefit to most stepmothers (see below).

[57] Champlin (1991) 120ff., Treggiari (1991a) 383ff.

whether heir or legatee, customarily received a smaller portion than the children.[58] If, on the other hand, there was no surviving child, or a child had been formally disinherited, a wife might be made sole heir.[59] Given the possibility of disputing a will under the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will'), however, it seems unlikely that stepmothers would often attempt to acquire the inheritance for themselves by getting their stepchild cut out of the will.[60] Furthermore, and most importantly, such an act would only be of benefit to the stepmother in special circumstances. Under the Augustan marriage laws, the amount that a wife was entitled to receive from her husband's estate, either as heir or legatee, was limited to 1/10, unless certain conditions were fulfilled. Of these, the most common was the existence of a surviving common child between the couple. In the case of the stepmother who desires the inheritance for herself, one may assume that this condition does not apply. The only other circumstances in which the law would allow this stepmother to claim the whole of the inheritance were the following: if she was related to her husband up to the sixth degree, if she was outside the statutory child-bearing age (i.e. below 20 or above 50), or if the current marriage had produced offspring who had died.[61] Clearly the scene depicted in the declamation, where a stepmother (apparently childless) gets her husband to change his will in her favour, is a fiction; it may have some basis in real life cases such as that described by Pliny, but these could not have been very common.[62]

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[58] This would apply whether they were her children or her stepchildren. There are a few exceptions, e.g. where the wife was made heir but with a *fideicommissum* ('bequest in trust') to hand the estate over to the children at a specified time. See Champlin (1991) 121.

[59] E.g. Petron., *Sat.* 71.3., *Dig.* 49.14.9. Humbert (1972) 212 n.17, finds 19 other cases where a widow is instituted heir, but where it is uncertain whether there were any children.

[60] Assuming that the other way—murder—was out of the question in most cases as being too risky. A stepmother might, however, try to get a stepchild disinherited if he (or she) was very young: given the high rate of infant and child mortality, the stepmother might count on her stepchild not surviving to adulthood to claim his inheritance, which she could, in any case, enjoy in the meantime. On the other hand, fatherless children had a *tutor* ('guardian') to protect their interests (cf. the case in the *Codex* of Justinian 6.2.11 (under Diocletian) where a guardian accuses a stepmother of embezzlement on behalf of his ward, her stepson).

[61] One who died after reaching puberty, or two after the age of three, or three after the name-day. If she had children from a previous marriage, she could take only an additional 1/10 for each child. See Tit. Ulp., 16.1, 15.1–4., P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower, 225BC–AD 14* (Oxford: 2nd ed., 1987) 564.

[62] Cf. Treggiari (1991a) 391. It is just possible that the idea was introduced as a

3. *Examples that contradict the stereotype*

We have seen that stepmotherly activities of the conventional kind are not frequently attested. On the contrary, although the *bona noverca* ('good stepmother') is virtually unknown in fiction, many of the historical Roman stepmothers for whom some information is available can be classified under that heading.

Mention has already been made of the stepmother of Seneca's mother Helvia, and the fact that, despite admitting that she was a *bona noverca*, Seneca cannot resist adding 'even a good stepmother costs dear'.[63] Such is not the case with two other famous examples of *bonae novercae*, Octavia, sister of Augustus, and Fannia, daughter of Thrasea Paetus, both of whom are afforded unqualified praise in their rôle of stepmother. In these cases, however, the sources, undoubtedly biased, must be approached with caution.

For Fannia we have only the testimony of Pliny the Younger, a close friend of the family, who mentions her twice in the Letters.[64] The granddaughter of Arria, whose unselfish devotion to her husband Caecina Paetus was famous,[65] Fannia is commended in *Ep.*7.19 not as a stepmother but as a peerless individual. Her virtues are on this occasion illustrated by her charity in nursing a sick Vestal so that she caught the disease herself and was now in grave peril. In further discussing this paragon, Pliny lays particular stress on her wifely devotion to her husband, for whose sake she endured exile on three occasions: twice she followed him into banishment, the third time she was exiled herself. It is in *Ep.* 9.13 that Fannia's qualities as a stepmother are discussed. In this letter Pliny self-importantly recounts the circumstances of his accusation, some years earlier, of Publius Certus in the Senate. Under Domitian, Fannia's stepson

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declamatory theme before the Augustan legislation, and was continued after it ceased to have much relevance for real life. The false accusation of parricide (in Sen., *Con.* 7.1 and [Quint.], *Decl.* 2) *is*, however, related to real life circumstances to the extent that a very grave offence was needed to justify disinherison, so strongly was it felt that the son had a natural claim to the inheritance. (For this reason, the grounds for disinherison were often given in the will, to preclude the possibility of a claim under the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will'): see Champlin (1991) 15).

[63] Discussed above, chapter 1.

[64] For Fannia, see Sherwin-White (1966) on *Ep.* 7.19.1.

[65] Especially how, when her husband was condemned under Claudius to commit suicide, she stabbed herself to set an example, uttering the famous words "Paete non dolet" ("It doesn't hurt, Paetus"): see Mart., 1.13., Plin., *Ep.* 3.16., Dio Cass., 60. 16.5–6.

Helvidius Priscus had been executed unjustly among those prosecuted in a Senatorial trial for treasonable involvement with Senecio in 93; after Domitian's death, Pliny successfully arraigned Publius Certus, who had attacked Priscus; he was supported on this occasion both by Helvidius' stepmother Fannia and by her mother Arria, his stepgrandmother.

Fannia is a stepmother who, rather than destroying her stepson, wanted revenge on the man responsible for his death. Note, however, that she is also described by Pliny as a paradigm of women in general, and Pliny is of course biased in her favour.[66]

The case of Octavia will be examined in detail in the next chapter. Suffice to say for the present that she is to be classed as a good stepmother in the sense that she raised uncomplainingly the children of her husband Antony's other unions, but that her reputation as a paragon of virtue is exaggerated, if not pure invention.

Sulla's stepmother, who made him her heir, loved him as a son, according to Plutarch.[67] Two stepmothers adopted their stepsons: Livia Ocellina, whose adopted stepson, the future emperor Galba, even took her name,[68] and in the third century, Valeria, daughter of Diocletian, adopted Candidianus, son of her husband Galerius by a concubine, when she herself failed to produce a child.[69]

Several examples of good stepmothers have been mentioned. Note, however, that in most instances the stepmother has no children of her own; the major exception is Octavia, but in her case the bias of the sources makes it difficult to assess the extent to which she fulfilled the rôle of *bona noverca.*

4. *Less severe forms of stepmotherly behaviour*

Although the stepmotherly malevolence of fiction in its extreme manifestations (murder, disinheritance) is not often backed up by real-life precedents, and despite the existence of good stepmothers, I would suggest, nonetheless, that the *saeva noverca* found in literature and rhetoric was to some extent based on social realities.

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[66] Note that she does not seem to have had any children of her own (Sherwin-White (1966) on *Ep.* 7.19.8): in most cases a prerequisite for a good stepmother!

[67] *Sull.* 2.

[68] Suet., *Gal.* 4.1.

[69] Lactant., *De mort. persecut.* 50.2. In general, women were barred from adopting

(i) *Possible areas of conflict*

The stereotype may mirror, though in a polarised and distorted form, the everyday conflicts which must have occurred in actual Roman stepfamilies, but for which we have limited evidence.[70] I have already brought to bear contemporary sociological research into stepfamilies in discussing 5th century Athens; much of this is also relevant to Rome.[71] Apart from general tensions arising from psychological and sociological factors, there were no doubt many disputes in the area of inheritance also, which involved less serious matters than the complete disinheritance of a stepchild. We have some evidence for this in the form of law suits recorded in the Codex of Justinian, mostly from the third century, in which stepchildren of both sexes accused their stepmothers of such crimes as stealing property from stepchildren[72] and forging their husband's wills.[73] Since in these cases the verdict is not recorded, they do not necessarily offer evidence of stepmotherly malevolence, but they certainly attest to conflict between stepmothers and stepchildren. It is probable also that there were disputes of which we hear nothing because they did not result in a court case. For example, there were ways in which a stepmother may have exerted interference in her husband's testa-

children, since they did not legally have *potestas* (see Gardner (1986) 144); another case from the time of Diocletian is recorded in Justinian's *Codex* (8. 47 (48) 5): a woman was granted permission to adopt her stepson in compensation for the loss of her own sons.

[70] One example of potential conflict is the story (Plut., *Cic.* 41.5) that Cicero divorced his second wife after an extremely short marriage partly because she was pleased about the death of Tullia (who was much older than herself and who was greatly loved by her father—was there jealousy on the part of the second wife?). It is unlikely that Julia and her stepmother Livia got on very well (see chapter 6 n. 12). The tomb inscriptions offer further evidence—see discussion below.

[71] Cf. Bradley (1991a) 138f "from the moment of birth the life of the upper-class Roman child was potentially subject to a high degree of emotional uncertainty and dislocation, the product of such factors as early separation from a natural parent by death or divorce... conjunction with step-parents". This sort of insecurity parallels that described by contemporary sociologists, who see it as leading to behavioural problems and tensions within the family (see discussion in chapter 3).

[72] *Codex* 9.32.3 (a case from the 2nd century): a stepmother is accused by her stepdaughter on a charge of 'expilata hereditas' ('stolen inheritance') in relation to the stepdaughter's inheritance from her grandfather; 6.2.11 (under Diocletian and Maximian): a guardian accuses a stepmother of embezzlement on behalf of his ward, her stepson; 7.34.1 (Diocletian and Maximian): a stepmother is responsible for the disappearance of the title deeds to her stepdaughter's farm; 9.33.5 (Diocletian and Maximian): a stepdaughter brings an action 'vi bonorum raptorum' ('of property seized by force') against a stepmother.

[73] *Codex* 9.22.4 (3) (late 3rd century); we are not told how the will was supposed to have been altered.

mentary disposition while keeping within the law. As long as all legitimate children were not neglected, a father was free to decide the apportionment of the estate. Many wills are recorded in which children received unequal shares; the discrepancy might be as much as one quarter to one child and three quarters to the other (though usually it is daughters who are disadvantaged in this way in favour of sons).[74] In theory, then, a second wife could persuade her husband to bequeath a greater share of the estate to their common son than to the son of his first marriage: although this would no doubt attract public disapprobation, as long as the stepson was named coheir and received the statutory 'Falcidian fourth' there would be nothing he could do about it.[75] In a similar way, a stepmother with a son from a previous marriage might prevail upon her husband to institute his own child heir to only a quarter of the estate while leaving up to 3/4 in the form of a legacy to her son, though whether even a stepmother would have enough power over her husband in reality to induce him to forget the obligations of *pietas* in this fashion is highly questionable.[76]

(ii) *Fear of stepmotherly malevolence*

It is certain that the remarriage of a man with surviving offspring was perceived as an ever-present threat to the children of the first marriage, especially in terms of their position as their father's heirs. Regardless of whether or not scenarios such as the one hypothesised in the preceding section actually occurred with any frequency, the image of the *saeva noverca* may be viewed as an embodiment of fears for the welfare of the children in the event of their father's remarrying.

The second marriage of a father would of necessity be detrimental to the inheritance prospects of his existing children, given the legal requirement that the legitimate children of both marriages must be appointed heirs and the moral obligation of a Roman husband to make provision for his wife.[77] This state of affairs, moreover, could

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[74] Champlin (1991) 113ff.

[75] In practice, no doubt, many prudent and less greedy stepmothers were content if they persuaded their husbands to leave their own child a greater, but not considerably greater, share than their stepchild.

[76] Although legatees could in theory receive up to 3/4 of the estate, it was not normal practice for them to be left a larger share than the heir. See n. 56 above.

[77] The disadvantages to the children caused by remarriage were also recognised by emperors who did not remarry, e.g. Galba (Suet., *Gal.* 5.1) or took a concubine after their wives' deaths, e.g. Vespasian (Suet., *Vesp.* 3, Dio Cass., 66.14), Antoninus

not to be blamed on any individual.[78] But the feeling that a second marriage was threatening to the children of the first involved more than this: it assumed that 1) the children would be not merely disavantaged, but would be unfairly treated, either by being cut out of their father's will altogether, or at least by being deprived of possessions to which they had a moral right, such as their mother's inheritance or her dowry, which on her death might have become part of their father's estate 2) this would occur because the second wife, being their stepmother, would influence her husband against his children in favour of her own children.[79]

The existence of laws protecting the interests of the children of the first union[80] emphasises that the perpetration of injustice against them was regarded as a decided possibility. Also, the wills of mothers often included conditions whereby the woman making the will protected her children's interests in the event of her husband surviving her and remarrying.[81] Even if such measures were so effective

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Pius (S. H. A. *Ant.P.* 8.9), Marcus Aurelius (S. H. A. *Marc.* 29.10), and Commodus (Hdn., 1.16.4).

[78] Unless the stepmother incurs blame for seducing the father into marrying her in the first place: this is, in fact, what is implied in the Pliny *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will') mentioned earlier, but there it is specially appropriate because of the age of the husband—at 80 he must die in the fairly near future, nor is he likely to provide his new wife with offspring, all of which invites the suspicion that she is a legacy-hunter.

[79] Or in her own favour, if she had no children.

[80] As Humbert demonstrated, (1972) 189ff. These included the prohibition of gifts *inter vivos* ('between living persons') between husband and wife, the fact that the children take precedence over the wife in the intestate rules of succession, and the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will'), though the last mentioned protected the children from any sort of unjust disinherison, not just where there was a stepmother, and also protected other close relatives, e.g. brothers. Also, the Augustan law by which husbands and wives could only take 1/10 unless they had a common child, while aimed principally at increasing the birthrate or keeping wealth within the family (cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Family and Inheritance in the Augustan Marriage Laws", *PCPhS* 27 (1981), 58–80), nonetheless also had the effect of protecting the heirs from a childless second spouse attempting to obtain much for herself.

[81] E.g. she made her children heirs but with a *fideicommissum* on the husband to emancipate them from his *potestas*. The reason for this was that if she predeceased her husband, the children would still be *in patria potestate*; this meant that their money technically belonged to their father and although fathers often gave it to them as *peculium* ('private property') or bequeathed it to them, the father might not do so, especially if influenced by a second wife. It must be noted, though, that men made this sort of will as often as women did. Were they afraid of stepfathers? Or did the desire of both men and women to protect the interests of their children have nothing to do with a new spouse interfering? See Humbert (1972) 207ff. for full discussion.

that injustices of this kind rarely occurred in practice, this does not mean that the threat was not felt as a real one.

Not only was the remarriage of a father feared, but the danger inherent in the situation was attributed solely to the presence of a stepmother. There is evidence that adult children were strongly opposed to their fathers taking a second wife for this reason. Cicero records opposition on the part of his nephew Quintus when he thought that his father was planning to marry Aquilia after divorcing Quintus' mother Pomponia. Cicero, it will be noted, is indulgent of his nephew's attititude ("hoc tolerabile fortasse" "this is perhaps tolerable"), though whether Quintus' hostility was aimed at stepmothers in general or Aquilia in particular, is unclear.[82] The following story is told by Plutarch (*Cat. Mai.* 24) of Cato the Censor. When Cato's wife died, he realised that his son (Marcus Licinianus) and the son's wife, who both lived with him, objected to their aged[83] father taking a slave girl as mistress. Accordingly, he announced his engagement to a young girl, daughter of a humble client of his, Salonius. When the son asked his father what offence he had committed to have a stepmother imposed on him, Cato replied that he had no fault to find with him; on the contrary, his motive for marriage was the desire to provide more citizens for the state of equal quality to his son. Plutarch's comments on the incident elsewhere[84] tell us something about his own moral attitudes and his snobbery. He censures Cato in the strongest terms, arguing that the reason given by him for remarrying was obviously spurious: had his sole motive been to produce further offspring of excellence, he would not have taken a slave girl before marrying, and he would have selected a bride of better social standing instead of the young daughter of a humble man who could easily be persuaded to the match. Rather, he was paying back his son

[82] *Att.* 14.17.3: "Quintus filius ad patrem acerbissimas litteras misit... quarum... erat caput Aquiliam novercam non esse laturum" ("Quintus junior has sent his father a very bitter letter... of which... the main point was that he would not tolerate Aquilia as a stepmother". According to Cicero (*Att.* 14.13.5), however, his brother had no intention of remarrying. Cf. Plaut., *Stich.* 108ff.: when a father pretends that he is going to remarry his daughters are not pleased.

[83] Cato was round 80 at the time of his second marriage: see A.E. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford: 1978) 105. The marriage, and the subsequent birth of a son (Marcus Salonianus), was famous as an example of male fertility at an advanced age: cf. Plin., *Nat.* 7.61f., Gell., 13.20.7f., Solin., 1.59., [Victor], *De Vir. Ill.* 47.9 (none of these sources mention the opposition of Cato's son to his father's second marriage).

[84] *Comparison of Aristides and Cato* 6.

for his objection to his mistress, an objection with which Plutarch is clearly in sympathy.[85] The introduction of a stepmother, then, is regarded as a punishment inflicted on the son of the first marriage; the son's hostility towards his father's remarriage is derived from the fact that it will mean acquiring a stepmother.[86]

Although a man taking a second wife, especially if he was much older than the woman, might be so besotted with her as to neglect the children of his first marriage, this possibility is not countenanced. Thus Pliny, in describing the disinheritance of Attia Viriola by her father, uses coloured language in order to cast the entire blame on the stepmother: Attia was disinherited, he says, by her octogenarian father within eleven days from when, captured by love, he introduced a stepmother. In relating a case in which he was himself involved as the daughter's advocate, Pliny is of necessity biased. His manner of expression, however, is echoed in the comments of Gaius on the use of the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will') by those who have been unjustly disinherited:

> non est enim consentiendum parentibus, qui iniuriam adversus liberos suos testamento inducunt: quod plerumque faciunt, maligne circa sanguinem suum inferentes iudicium, *novercalibus delenimentis instigationibusve corrupti.*

> for we must not condone parents (i.e. fathers) who inflict injury on their own children through their will: which they often do, malevolently causing a legal dispute with their own flesh and blood, *when they have been beguiled by the enticements and urgings of a stepmother.*[87]

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[85] Plutarch's view is that sexual activity in old age demonstrates an unseemly lack of temperance (he compares Aristides favourably in this respect): one might say, rather, that in this case Licinianus got his just deserts in the form of a stepmother, a situation that might have been avoided if he had been able to acknowledge the sexual needs of his elderly father and allowed him to take a little harmless pleasure with a mistress.

[86] Another case of resentment towards a stepmother on the part of a stepson comes from the 2nd century AD (Scaevola): in *Dig.* 34.4.31.2, the question under discussion is a stepson's entitlement to a legacy from his stepmother after he had brought her to court on a charge of murdering his father and she had been found not guilty (the stepmother had died before the murder trial ended). Not only was this stepmother apparently innocent of murder, but she had not retracted the legacy to her stepson even after he had accused her wrongly: a clear case where the feelings of hostility are on the side of the younger generation (unless she really was guilty, in which case she might have tried to make a good impression by refusing to withdraw the inheritance).

[87] Gaius, *Dig.* 5.2.4.

Now it might be argued that considerations of *pietas* and *officium* ('obligation') normally exercised such a strong influence on testators that it would have taken a third party to induce a father to disinherit his children.[88] And in the case of Pliny's Attia, the age of the father suggests that the new wife was indeed guilty of legacy-hunting. Yet when it is the mother who remarries and disinherits her children in favour of her new spouse, there is no question of the stepfather being accorded any blame.[89] A passage of Valerius Maximus is illuminating in this respect. Septicia, a woman who was past the age of childbearing, got married, for the second time, to an older man, and disinherited her sons. The case came before Augustus: he judged the marriage void, awarding the estate and the dowry to the sons. Valerius' own comments are pertinent. He heartily approves of Augustus' decision and expresses his own disgust not merely that a woman should turn against her own children, but that she should remarry at such an advanced age:

> spernis quos genuisti, nubis effeta, testamenti ordinem violento animo confundis neque erubescis ei totum patrimonium addicere, cuius pollincto

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[88] E.g. Champlin (1991) 108, makes the point that even where a father had in anger threatened to disinherit a son, when it came to the point, feeling of *pietas* prevailed.

[89] Cf. Apul., *Apol.* 71: Apuleius' stepson resented Apuleius' marriage to his mother Pudentilla "metuens ne .... omnia, ut saepe fit, in mariti domum conferret" ('because he feared that ... she would transfer all her possessions, as often happens, to her husband's house"). Note that Apuleius puts the blame in such circumstances on the mother rather than the stepfather: although it is obviously in his interests to do so in a case where he is defending himself against the charge of being a 'wicked stepfather' by arguing among other things that it was he who prevented his wife from disinheriting her son, nevertheless his arguments carry weight because they are in line with generally accepted views. Stepfathers might in theory have had a similar reputation to that of stepmothers: the laws and wills attempting to secure the position of the children of the first marriage, referred to earlier, concern the remarriage of both mothers and fathers indiscriminately and show that the remarriage of a mother was viewed as just as much a threat to the children as that of a father. Apuleius, as we saw, says it was common ('ut saepe fit' 'as often happens') for mothers to transfer their property away from their children to their new husband. Noy (1991), 352, points out, however, that stepfathers would have had less opportunities for interference than stepmothers because the children had already come into their dead father's inheritance (usually more important than that of their mother) and if they were under age, they had a *tutor* ('guardian') to protect their interests; as to their mother's own wealth, her *tutor* might have exercised his veto if she favoured her new husband over her children. In that case, Apuleius' remark ('ut saepe fit') probably shows that guardians by this period had little influence in practice. At any rate, stepfathers did not acquire the same reputation as stepmothers because the image of the stepmother was derived not merely from fears about the results of remarriage but also from misogynistic attitudes to women: see further below.

> iam corpori marcidam senectutem tuam substravisti. ergo dum sic te geris, ad inferos usque caelesti fulmine deflata es.
> you spurn those whom you bore, you marry when worn out with age, you impetuously upset the order of your will and you don't blush to bequeath your whole estate to him beneath whose body, virtually a corpse, you have lain your withered old self. And so while you behave in this fashion, you have been blasted all the way to hell with the thunderbolt of heaven.[90]

Unlike the remarrying father who disinherits his children only through the stepmotherly influence of his new spouse, the mother is here represented as taking the initiative, both in disinheriting her children, and in the sexual arena as well.[91] Although Valerius' disapproval of the marriage is in keeping with the spirit of the Augustan marriage legislation, whereby the only acceptable reason for entering into marriage was the procreation of children, Valerius' remarks, couched as they are in sexual terms, carry the implication that if an old woman marries when she is past child-bearing age her motive must be lust. Whereas an aged father who takes a new wife is simply regarded as a foolish old man, a figure of Comedy, led astray by the wiles of a stepmother, when it is a mother who behaves in this way she becomes the very image of the disgusting lustful crone commonly abused in literature.[92] The case thus highlights the bias that was felt towards stepmothers (as opposed to stepfathers) as well as one of the reasons for this: the general tendency in antiquity to blame the madness induced by love on *female* sexuality, and also to draw a sharp distinction between older men and women in terms of sexual behaviour.

5. *The evidence of the inscriptions*

Up to this point, I have concentrated chiefly on the wealthy minority with whom the literary evidence is concerned. The funerary monuments, by contrast, may enable us to widen the scope of the discussion. Given that the majority of these were erected by mem-

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[90] Val. Max., 7.7.4.

[91] For *substernere* ('lit. to spread beneath') with the implication that the woman takes the sexual initiative cf. Catull., 64. 403 "ignaro mater substernens se impia nato" ("the impious mother laying herself beneath/prostituting herself to her unwitting son").

[92] E.g. Hor., *Epod.* 12, Canidia etc., cf. Richlin (1983) 109ff.

bers of the humbler sections of the community,[93] in other words, by people owning little or no property, it will be specially interesting to see whether they reinforce the image of the stepmother, since in many cases the stereotypic motivation for stepmotherly malevolence—greed to obtain an inheritance—will have been absent.

Humbert collected 50 tombstone inscriptions involving a stepfamily (11 inscriptions by or for a stepmother, 37 involving a stepfather and 2 where the sex of the step-parent is unclear). These he examined with a view to determining the extent to which they back up literary evidence of conflicts in stepfamilies, in particular the 'wicked stepmother' stereotype. Two of Humbert's observations are of special significance: first, the general paucity of such inscriptions; second, the fact that in most cases where a step-parent or stepchild is incorporated with apparent harmony into a family group there do not appear to be any step—or half-siblings, in other words, the usual reason for conflict within a stepfamily—the rival claims of children vis à vis stepchildren—is absent.

Although Humbert's researches are a good starting-point, they must be both supplemented and modified. Firstly, more inscriptions may be added, since Humbert did not draw from the whole of *CIL* 6[94] and he only included inscriptions where the steprelationship is clearly indicated by terms such as *privignus*, *noverca* and *vitricus*.[95] Secondly, some omissions must be noted: (i) Humbert did not compare inscriptions involving 'normal' (as opposed to step-) families as a control: this, we shall see, adds important qualifications to some results (ii) although his literary examples of stepfamily conflict involve stepmothers, he did not distinguish between tombs for/by stepmothers and those involving stepfathers (iii) by limiting his examination of stepfamily relations to a single criterion, namely whether or not the recipient of the inscription finds a place in a family tomb,[96] Humbert fails to take account of other factors which, if afforded due consideration, also yield interesting results, for instance, the terms of endearment

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[93] Saller and Shaw (1984), 136.

[94] (1972) 199ff. He only counted inscriptions between *CIL* 6.4600 and 29600.

[95] The term *filiaster* is problematical, since it can bear more than one meaning: see further below. With the benefit of the computer concordance to *CIL* 6, other examples may be added, especially those where a steprelationship is, I would argue, indicated by such terms as *filio/ae eius* 'for his (her) son/daughter' (referring to a stepchild) or *coniugi/uxori eius* 'for his (her) husband/wife' (referring to a step-parent).

[96] As a criterion for establishing the closeness of family feelings, this is severely flawed: see discussion below.

employed and the sex of the stepchildren.

I have counted a total of 21 inscriptions set up either for a stepmother by a stepchild (7 examples) or (in 14 cases) by a stepmother for a stepchild.[97] These will be discussed under the following headings: (i) the paucity of examples in comparison with tombs involving a mother, and especially the lack of inscriptions in which a stepmother is commemorated by a stepchild (ii) the presence of other family members in the tomb (iii) the sex of the stepchild (iv) the terminology used both to indicate stepfamily relationships and to express affection for the deceased (v) a comparison with tombs involving stepfathers.

(i) *small number of inscriptions involving a stepmother*

Granted that real-life stepmothers must have been common, we might have expected to find more than 21 tomb inscriptions in which a stepmother is represented. Before drawing any inferences from these bare statistics, however, several factors must be taken into account.

First, the situation where a tomb is erected by a stepchild for a stepmother. One reason for the rarity of these is that most stepmothers would have been buried by some other family member, the fact that they were stepmothers not being recorded on the inscription.

The person (or persons) responsible for the funeral expenses of a married woman—who was usually also the commemorator—was in most cases either her husband, her father, or her heir(s). If a woman's husband were still alive, her monument would normally be provided by him.[98] A sample of 1,000 inscriptions from *CIL* 6[99] shows that of 246 *matronae* ('married women') who receive a tomb, 152 are commemorated by their husbands alone.[100] Most

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[97] For further details, see Appendix 4.

[98] The funeral expenses were paid out of the dowry (*dos*), which would normally belong to the husband, unless her father was still alive and had provided her dowry out of his estate (*dos profecticia*), in which case the dowry would revert to the father and he would be responsible for the funeral expenses. (If there was no dowry, the duty would fall upon her heirs or father, or failing either, her husband.) If she left property, the expenses of the funeral would be shared between the husband and the heirs. See Gardner (1986) 107, Treggiari (1991a) 491. Thus a woman whose husband was alive would in most cases be buried by him, or in some circumstances, her father (though this is less likely: a woman had only a 50% chance of her father being alive at the date of her first marriage: S. Treggiari (1991b) 32).

[99] *CIL* 6.3, nos. 15127–16126.

[100] In 41 other cases, where the woman is commemorated by children, the husband is probably deceased.

stepmothers who died before their husbands, then, will have appeared on inscriptions in the rôle of wife. There are, it is true, cases (7 in the sample referred to above) in which a wife receives a tomb from her husband and her children jointly, whereas there are no examples of a stepmother being commemorated by her husband along with her stepchild. Does this show lack of affection for stepmothers on the part of their stepchildren? Not necessarily: in the 7 instances just referred to, the children may have been heirs;[101] in any case the number of examples even for mothers is so small (the 7 cases represent only 4.6% of the 152 for a *coniunx/uxor* 'spouse/wife') that we would not statistically expect to find any cases among our mere 7 inscriptions set up for a stepmother.

Where a woman's husband had predeceased her—and this must have been the more common scenario—[102] she would be buried, according to the rules given by the jurists,[103] by her father or her heirs. In cases where a will was left, the heirs would normally be the woman's own children. If she also had stepchildren who were not mentioned on the monument, this would not necessarily be indicative of bad relations: it was natural, and indeed obligatory in terms of social practice,[104] for a mother to name her own children as her heirs. She might even have left a legacy to a stepchild, and since the heir, rather than the legatee, paid for the tomb, one would not expect the stepchild's name to appear in those circumstances.[105] The majority of our inscriptions, however, probably involve women who have died without making a will.[106] Since a woman's heirs by intestacy were in the first instance her agnates rather than her children,[107] and since, on the other hand, agnates (in contrast to sons and daughters) are

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[101] I.e. this may be a case where a woman of property is buried by her husband and her heirs (see above n. 98).

[102] Given that husbands were normally older than wives and that a widower remarrying often chose a woman of child-bearing age (Treggiari (1991a) 401).

[103] Referred to in note 98 above.

[104] The *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will') could be invoked if a woman failed to institute her own children as heirs: cf. the case cited in Valerius Maximus (7.7.4) discussed earlier.

[105] Champlin (1991) 49ff.

[106] Given that the majority of ordinary Romans—with whom most of the inscriptions are concerned—died intestate, and that women as a rule were less likely to make a will than men: Champlin (1991) 43.

[107] At least until the senatus consultum Orphitianum (late 2nd century AD); see Gardner (1986) 192ff. A freedwoman's heir would be her patron.

very rare as commemorators,[108] it is probable that in the absence of a testamentary heir a woman's children normally gave her a tomb, not as heirs, but as the person (or persons) most closely tied to the deceased by bonds of duty.[109]

The rarity of tombs for stepmothers might, we have seen, be explained to some extent by the fact that women who were stepmothers would normally have been commemorated in another guise—i.e. as wife or mother,[110] nor would we expect, as I have shown, to find tombs set up by a stepchild for a stepmother along with the husband or with the stepmother's own child, and indeed, there are none. All tombs for a stepmother are donated by a stepchild alone. In such cases, a stepchild has buried their stepmother because she has no closer relatives who might more appropriately do so. It would certainly be wrong to conclude that the stepchild only performed their duty reluctantly because there was no one else:[111] after all, there was no need to give the woman a monument at all, or at any rate, a monument on which the commemorator was named.[112] Rather, if a stepchild establishes a tomb for their stepmother, they have either been made heir, or else they act out of affection. The fact that even some inscriptions are dedicated to stepmothers is an indication, then, that good relationships might exist.[113]

Second, inscriptions by a stepmother for a stepchild. Although these are more frequent than those to a stepmother, their number is nonetheless small, especially when compared with the number of inscriptions by mothers for children (over 1000 in *CIL* 6). In most cases the stepmother donates the tomb by herself, often because her husband

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[108] Saller and Shaw (1984), 136.

[109] Saller and Shaw (1984), 126.

[110] It is also possible that some women who refer to themselves as the mother of a child were really the stepmother: see further below under point 4 'terminology used'.

[111] Likewise one cannot say on this basis alone that a good relationship only exists if there are no children, since as we have seen, where there are children as well as stepchildren the children would normally be the ones to set up the monument.

[112] Saller and Shaw (1984), 26–7, make the point that the commemorator is not always named. If husbands normally predeceased their wives, then the majority of tombs for women ought to have been set up by someone other than the husband: in fact, most women are buried by their husbands. This suggests that many widows must have died without receiving a monument at all.

[113] We cannot of course know how many stepmothers there were without husbands or children of their own who were refused a monument by a stepchild.

(the child's father) is dead or absent.[114] Certainly, a large number of such inscriptions would not be expected, not only because there were less stepmothers than mothers but also because there was a more limited timespan in which a stepmother could set up a tomb for a child than there was for a mother.[115] But this does not completely explain the very small number of inscriptions by stepmothers. Moreover, we *would* expect cases where the stepmother is the donor of a tomb to her stepchild along with the father. Athough wives were most frequently buried by their husbands alone (and so many stepmothers are hidden under the title *uxor* ('wife'), in the case of tombs for young children, by contrast, the *paterfamilias* ('head of the household') often combines with his wife, the mother, to erect a tomb for their child. It would seem a reasonable assumption, then, that if a stepmother enjoyed an affectionate relationship with her stepchild she might wish to be named on the monument along with the father. Although there are some examples of this,[116] there must have been many other cases in which a father who had remarried buried a child. It is likely, then that there are many hidden examples of stepmothers whose feelings for their stepchild, even if they did not amount to active dislike, were insufficiently warm to warrant the stepmother being mentioned on the stepchild's tomb inscription.

Finally, we must consider the fact that tombs are established by stepmothers for stepchildren twice as frequently as the reverse. Taken at face value, this might appear to demonstrate a greater aversion on the part of stepchildren to commemorating their stepmothers than vice versa, a conclusion which would contrast sharply with the stereotype, in which hostility is entertained by stepmothers rather than stepchildren. But a comparison with cases involving mothers shows a similar trend: in *CIL* 6, there are 1000 inscriptions by mothers for children, in contrast to only 600 inscriptions by children for their mothers.[117] No significant conclusions, then, can be drawn from the statistics in this instance.

To summarise, the small number of tombs by and for stepmothers

[114] Cf. 6.4566, 6713, 11472, 25283; 9.2095, *Not. d. scav.* 1923, *Not. d. scav.* 1925.
[115] The child's death would have had to occur in the years between the father's second marriage and the child's own marriage, after which time they would be commemorated as husband or wife.
[116] 2.871, 6.24043 and 24805 (though the last two are uncertain).
[117] See Dixon (1988) 229 n. 13.

does not in itself provide evidence that relationships with stepmothers were not normally good. On the other hand, the rarity of stepmothers as donors of tombs to their stepchildren in company with the child's father might demonstrate a lack of warmth on the part of stepmothers towards the stepchildren in their care.

(ii) *the presence of other family members in the tomb*

The main criterion used by Humbert for determining the closeness of stepfamily relations was whether or not the step-parent or stepchild was allocated a place in a family tomb. If they were included, this would be evidence of a cordial relationship (e.g. 6.6713, where a tomb is set up by Memmia Flora for her *filiaster* Vitalis (age 18) and for herself and her husband). Otherwise (e.g. if the step-parent or stepchild is the sole occupant of a tomb, such as in 6.11816, an inscription for Annia Restituta by M. Turannius her *privignus*), then this must be regarded as a limited gesture which does not preclude the possibility of at least lukewarm relations, since the stepchild or step-parent is not regarded as part of the family group.

Of Humbert's 50 stepfamily inscriptions, only 13 were included by him in his first category, i.e. where the recipient of the inscription is given a place in the family tomb. (In all 13 cases, the donor is a step-parent rather than a stepchild.) Of his 10 inscriptions involving a female step-parent, only 3 are in category 1. This looks at first sight like good evidence that relationships with stepmothers rarely involved affectionate feelings. The picture changes, however, if Humbert's categorisation is called into dispute in some cases,[118] and if the extra inscriptions which I have collected are added. Of my 21

[118] Five inscriptions included by Humbert in category 2 belong, I suggest, in the first category: 1) The tomb of Artemidorus (14.5176) is assigned by Humbert to the second category since it is for Artemidorus' father and his wife (presumably A's stepmother) but not for the donor. But as Humbert himself later observes (p. 203 n. 48), Artemidorus may have intended that he would be buried in the same tomb, even though he doesn't mention the fact specifically. This is surely a case where the stepmother is regarded as part of the family group. 2) 2.5008 is an inscription by G. Fabius Tuscus for Julia Severa Audalea and G. Fabius, son of Gaius, for his excellent son and *pia noverca*. It is not clear whether Julia is the stepmother of Tuscus or of his son: the former is probably more likely. In either case, this should not have been placed by Humbert among the inscriptions showing a limited gesture. Although Gaius senior does not include himself in the tomb, the fact that he buries his stepmother along with his own son surely shows that he held her in esteem. Alternatively, if Julia is his son's *noverca*, i.e. his second wife, the fact that the stepmother and stepson are in the same tomb shows he is thinking of them as a family group, and foresees that he will himself be buried in the same tomb one day. 3)

examples, 13 belong in category 1, (4[119] for and 9[120] by a stepmother), and 8 in category 2 (3 for and 5 by a stepmother): this means that in the case of both tombs for a stepmother by a stepchild, and those given by a stepmother, only the minority show what Humbert terms a limited gesture. But these statistics are small and subject to controversy: more significant is the fact that a comparison with inscriptions in which mothers include their own children in a family tomb, or vice versa, reveals, perhaps surprisingly, that these comprise only a minority of the total number. In the random sample of 1000 inscriptions,[121] of 45 dedicated to a mother, the recipient is put in a family tomb in only 12 cases, while only 43% of mothers burying their children include the child in a family tomb (26% where the tombs are erected by both parents jointly).[122] On this criterion, then, relations between stepmothers and stepchildren would seem to have been better than those between natural mothers and children! Clearly, the question of whether or not the deceased finds a place in the family tomb is irrelevant to the question of stepfamily relations.

Although the 'family tomb' question is, as I have shown, a red herring, one point made by Humbert in this connection is worth repeating: namely, that good relations in stepfamilies are evidenced mainly in those families where the couple do not have a child of

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6.7527 should have been included in group 1 rather than group 2, for although the stepson's father is not in the tomb, the stepmother herself is: if she did not like her stepson would she want to be buried in the same tomb? 4) In 3.5439 the inscription is by two children for themselves, their mother and their stepfather 5) in 6.15205 the stepchild is put in a tomb along with the mother and stepfather.

Also, some of Humbert's examples must be discarded: in category 1, 6.8533, where *filiaster* probably means illegitimate son (see Watson (1989), 546–47), and 6.10518 which appears to be a wrong reference. In category 2, the following are also wrong references: 6.14371, 19393 and 14. 2962.

[119] Adding to Humbert's examples 6.9108: cf. 14.5176 which as I argued above, should be in category 1; and 6.22715: set up by a man for his father, himself and his father's wife.

[120] This includes four cases where a stepmother sets up a tomb for her husband and his child but does not mention herself. Although this could be seen as a limited gesture (i.e. she did not want to be buried in the same tomb with her husband and stepchild), it is also possible that the wife had already been married and had a place reserved for her in her first husband's tomb, or perhaps she had a family tomb of own. Moreover, a sample of 1000 *CIL* 6 inscriptions involving a mother, shows 4 out of 11 cases where a mother sets up a tomb for her husband and child but not herself (as opposed to 7 by a mother for herself, her husband and her child).

[121] See above note 94.

[122] In the case of inscriptions involving fathers, family tombs feature even less commonly: the sample contains 17 cases of tombs for fathers, of which only 2 are in a family tomb (11%) and fathers put children in a tomb in 28% of the examples.

their own. As I demonstrated above, the fact that stepchildren rarely combine with children in donating a tomb to a mother is of no significance. On the other hand, where a stepmother establishes a family tomb for her husband, herself and her stepchild, one might expect to find some cases in which both children and stepchildren are included. The fact that examples of this are rare[123] might reinforce the theory that a good stepmother can only exist if she has no children of her own.

(iii) *The sex of the stepchild*

Inscriptions in which the commemorator is a stepmother show a marked preference for stepsons over stepdaughters (only 2 out of 14 are for stepdaughters).[124] Whether this demonstrates a special hostility toward stepdaughters on the part of stepmothers is, however, unclear, in view of the fact that inscriptions for sons greatly outnumber those for daughters;[125] furthermore, given that more monuments may have been set up for sons because daughters got married earlier (and were thus more likely to be commemorated as wives rather than daughters), there would be even less opportunity for stepdaughters to be commemorated by their stepmothers.

The marked discrepancy between the sexes in the case of tombs dedicated to a stepmother may be of greater significance. Here, the donor is in every case a stepson rather than a stepdaughter.[126] By contrast, daughters feature in 44% of the inscriptions for mothers in the *CIL* 6 sample.[127] Though we are dealing with very small figures in the case of stepmothers, nevertheless the conspicuous absence of tombs for stepmothers by stepdaughters might suggest, not only that relations between stepmothers and stepdaughters were not often cordial—a conclusion in accordance with both our previous findings with regard to 5th century Athens and also with contemporary research into stepfamilies—[128] but also that the real source of bad

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[123] Three examples: 6.23342, 26211 and 9.2095.

[124] 4 out of 16 if the two uncertain cases are included.

[125] In my sample, 65% of tombs set up by mothers are for sons, 35% for daughters. For the preference in favour of male children cf. Dixon (1988) 213f.

[126] This applies to my 7 definite cases: an exception would be 6.14367, set up by a stepdaughter, but here the name of the step-parent is not fully legible, and could be either male or female.

[127] This figure is confirmed by Dixon (1988) 230 n. 15: of 77 inscriptions *matri bm* ('for a well-deserving mother'), a son is a donor in 48 cases, a daughter in 34, i.e. 44%.

[128] There is also evidence elsewhere for Rome. Although it has been argued (e.g.

feelings is often the younger generation, rather than the stepmother.[129]

(iv) *Terminology used*

a) *to indicate stepfamily relationships*

One other noteworthy feature of the inscriptions is the way in which the steprelationship is designated. Dixon pointed to the rarity of the term *noverca* in inscriptions and suggested it may be deliberately avoided because of its evil associations.[130] In the case of inscriptions dedicated to a stepmother, the term is used only twice. More often, the steprelationship is indicated by the use of words for stepchild—*privignus/a* and *filiaster/tra*, or else by referring to the stepmother as the father's wife. Even more striking is the fact that on no occasion does a stepmother donating a tomb to a stepchild call herself *noverca*. Although it was possible (though not usual) to refer to a stepmother as *noverca* without invoking any derogatory connotations (e.g. 2.5008 *pia noverca*), a stepmother could not, apparently, apply the term to herself. Instead, she uses *privignus* or the more informal, affectionate *filiaster*.[131]

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by J.P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society*, Princeton: 1984) 257-8, cf. Dixon (1988) 167 n. 47) that there is little evidence for tension between stepmothers and stepdaughters, Noy (1991), 353, however, suggesting that the prevalence of stepsons in the literary stereotype is due to a Roman concern with inheritance, gives several examples from the Codex of Justinian (see above, n. 72) in which plaints against stepmothers are brought by daughters. Cf. also Pliny's Attia Viriola and Cicero's second wife, both referred to earlier. Since sons and daughters inherited equally under the rules of intestacy, the obsession with inheritance is insufficient in itself to explain the predominance of stepsons in the stereotype: for a suggested reason for the absence of stepdaughters, see above n. 53.

[129] If a stepchild who set up a tomb for a stepmother was the heir, this would bear witness to a special reluctance on the part of stepmothers to make stepdaughters their heirs. We cannot, however, be sure in most cases that the donor was also *heres* ('heir').

[130] (1988) 158, cf. Noy (1991), 348. The strength of the negative attitude towards stepmothers is also shown by the fact that the vulgar word for stepmother, *matrastra*, is likewise avoided: it is found in a sole inscription (*CIL* 11. 6730, 4) where it refers to Juno in relation to Hercules.This, in combination with the use of the French 'marâtre' to imply 'wicked stepmother' suggests that *matrastra* had pejorative connotations. We might not have expected this to be the case, especially given that the parallel formation *filiaster* is an affectionate term (see next note).

[131] That *filiaster* is informal is shown by its complete absence in literary texts. Although the suffix *-aster* often has derogatory connotations (= an inferior copy of something e.g. *poetaster*) these are lacking in the case of *filiaster*. Far from being derogatory, the term is used of illegitimate offspring as well as stepchildren: see Watson (1989), 536-548. Note also that in all inscriptions but one containing a term of endearment, *filiaster* is the term used. *Privignus*, by contrast, is used once with the

That the word *noverca* was felt to carry evil connotations is further underlined by its presence in two inscriptions where a *noverca* is being accused of stepmotherly behaviour. I have already discussed the case (*CIL* 12.810) in which the mother blames the stepmother for the death of her son. Another inscription (6.30123 = *CE* 600) refers to a young woman commemorated by her husband after her father had refused her a tomb and funeral expenses at the instigation of her *noverca*: note that the stepchild who suffers this injustice is female—further evidence of the difficulty of the stepmother-stepdaughter relationship.[132]

One final possibility must be considered. If feelings of affection existed between a stepmother and her stepchild, there is less likelihood that the terminology of steprelationships would be used at all. A child might, for instance, refer to their stepmother as *mater* ('mother').[133] It is possible therefore that there are at least some cases where a woman commemorated as *mater* is in reality a stepmother.[134] Likewise, a stepmother who had raised a stepchild from infancy might regard him or her as her *filius/a* ('son/daughter'), and in similar circumstances a couple, one of whom was a step-parent, might designate themselves *parentes* ('parents').

b) *to express endearment*

Of the 9 inscriptions for a stepmother, only 4 contain an epithet of endearment.[135] Furthermore, in three of these the term used is the perfunctory *b.m.* ('well-deserving'); the strongest is *pia* 'dutiful' (2.5008). The contrast with inscriptions for mothers is striking: of 600 cases in

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bland *pius* ('dutiful'); also where no terms of endearment are used of several people in the tomb, or where the husband receives an epithet but not the stepchild. Moreover, *filiaster* is only used where the step-parent is the commemorator: i.e. no one designates himself as *filiaster*.

[132] See Humbert (1972) 199 n. 38.

[133] In Seneca's *Phaedra*, Hippolytus innocently addresses his stepmother as 'mother' (line 608 "committe curas auribus, mater, meis" ("entrust your cares to my ears, mother"). Although the word is used here with special irony in view of the nature of the *curae* ('cares') to which Phaedra is about to confess, it may be that Seneca is able to exploit the irony precisely because *mater* ('mother'), rather than *noverca*, was the usual mode of address to a stepmother.

[134] It would, of course, be taking this argument too far to say that the lack of inscriptions set up for a stepmother constitutes proof that relations with stepmothers were predominantly affectionate (and that they were commemorated therefore as mother rather than stepmother), especially since we have no way of knowing how many stepmothers, if any, are hidden beneath the title *mater*.

[135] This includes the 2 uncertain ones (6.29679 and the partly legible 6.14367).

CIL 6, a term of endearment appears in 476 (i.e. 79%);[136] in 175 instances (i.e. 29%) an adjective such as *cara* ('dear') or *dulcissima* ('dearly-loved') is employed which, though conventional, suggests strong affection.[137] Despite the small number of tombs for stepmothers, the figures are nonetheless suggestive. A notable absence of real emotion is also seen in cases where a distinction is drawn between the stepmother and another occupant of the tomb. For instance, at 6.9108 a stepson erects a monument for his *pater merens* ('deserving father') Apsyrtus Horr. and 'coniunx eius' ('his wife'): while the father is both named and given the epithet *merens*, the stepmother is merely designated as his father's wife. Compare also 6.22715, in which a son sets up a tomb for his *pater benemer.* C. Murdius Felix and for himself, *suis* ('his family') etc and finally (almost as an afterthought) for Tullia Hygia, *coniunx eius.*

In the inscriptions commemorating a stepchild, terms of endearment appear only 6 times; in four instances the formal *b.m.* is used. Mothers, by contrast, give their child an epithet of endearment in around 70% of the cases in the *CIL* sample. Also to be noted is the fact that several stepmothers show favour to another person over the stepchild: in three inscriptions dedicated to a stepchild and a husband together, the latter receives an epithet while the stepchild does not (6.4566, 11472, *Not. d. sc.* 1923); at 9.2095 the son is named but not the *privignus*; once, where the stepmother is the donor in company with the father, only the father gives the boy an affectionate epithet (6.24805: Rufinia Auxesis and Popilius Fortunatus pat.f.dulc.; cf. 6.24043: the son is described as *dulciss[imus]* and his death is said to have deceived his father, whereas Petronia Nite, who may be his stepmother, is merely named as a donor). Signs of genuine affection are rare, the most conspicuous exception being 6.23342, set up by Octavia Faustina for herself, Pomponius Faustinus her *filius dulciss[imus]* ('dearly-loved son'), Sex. Cornelius Vetus her *filiaster dulciss.* ('dearly-loved stepson'), and Verecundus her *amicus incomparabilis* ('incomparable friend').[138]

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[136] Dixon (1988) 200.

[137] In contrast to the formal *bm* ('well-deserving') or *pia* ('dutiful') which suggests feelings of duty and gratitude rather than love.

[138] In the following the stepchild is given as much attention as anyone else in the tomb, or else is given equal attention by the stepmother and the father: 2.871 (by a father and a stepmother *privigno pio* ('for her dutiful stepson'), 6.6713 (for a *filiaster bm* ('well-deserving stepson') and herself and husband), 7527 (for *filiaster bm*, self and *posteri* ('descendants'), 26211 (for self, daughter, sister and *privigna*).

(v) *A comparison with inscriptions involving stepfathers*[139]

Stepfathers dedicate monuments to their stepchildren three times more frequently than do stepmothers, and there are almost twice as many monuments commemorating a stepfather as a stepmother. These statistics, taken alone, might suggest that relationships with stepfathers were more often harmonious than those with stepmothers. Such a conclusion will only be valid, however, if the greater number of tombs involving stepfathers is contrary to expectations.

Let us first consider the inscriptions by a stepfather for a stepchild. Given that tombs for children are donated with equal frequency by fathers and mothers,[140] the number of male and female step-parents who appear as commemorators might also be expected to be the same. There is, however, another important factor which must be taken into consideration, namely, the relative frequency with which stepmothers and stepfathers were the custodial[141] step-parents. The question is fraught with difficulties. Among the upper classes, given that husbands were normally considerably older than wives, there would have been more widows than widowers (even allowing for deaths in childbirth), and in fact we have more evidence of remarriage in the case of women than of men.[142] Though this would have resulted in a greater number of stepfathers than stepmothers, many of the former would have been stepfathers in name only: in the event of a widow remarrying, her children did not necessarily accompany her to the home of her new husband.[143] Moreover, in cases of divorce, the father usually retained custody of the children. Thus it is possible, though unprovable, that in the higher ranks of society there were more stepmothers than stepfathers who had close associations with stepchildren. With the lower classes whose funerary inscriptions

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[139] I have collected 57 examples which probably refer to a stepfather, 12 set up for a stepfather and 45 by a stepfather for a stepchild. See further Appendix 4.

[140] In my sample of 1000 inscriptions, 54 are donated by a mother and 53 by a father.

[141] When considering the inscriptions as evidence for stepfamily relations, it is obvious that a custodial step-parent would have closer ties with the stepchild and be more likely to feature on an inscription than one who has had little, if anything, to do with the stepchild (especially considering that the people who feature as donors or recipients of tombs are normally members of the nuclear family).

[142] In Humbert's list of leading families from Sulla to Nero (1972) 80ff., he has 16 men who married altogether 46 times, but 37 women married 89 times. Cf. Treggiari (1991a) 398ff.

[143] Dixon (1988) 50, says that as a rule, widows did not keep their children with them if they remarried.

comprise the bulk of our collection, however, the situation was probably different. For several reasons, to be discussed below, more mothers in this category would have had their children living with them, and consequently there would have been a greater number of custodial stepfathers.

Among the more humble citizens, there were several types of circumstance which may have resulted in a greater percentage of stepfathers than stepmothers having stepchildren under their care.

a) in the case of freeborn but humble citizens, a mother is likely to have taken her children with her when she remarried after the death of her husband: where transmission of wealth and the family name was not an issue, it may have seemed less important for children to remain in the family home of their father. As for divorce,[144] although it is said that the father had custody of the children, the examples usually cited to prove this come from the upper end of the social scale. That mothers sometimes did take children with them into a second marriage after a divorce is suggested by an inscription (6.14170) in which a father and stepfather combine with a mother to erect a tomb for their five-year-old son, L. Calpurnius Hypnus.[145]

b) where a mother was free or freed at the time of a child's conception, but the father was a slave, the child would be illegitimate, and would take its mother's name. If the relationship between the woman and her partner subsequently split up, or the father died, and the mother formed a new attachment, she would retain the care

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[144] The frequency of divorce among the lower classes is debatable: Saller (1991) 38. Humbert (1972) 343f., citing Luc. 5.764 "sorte frequenti plebeiaque nimis careo dimissa marito" ("by a fate that is frequent and too plebeian I am without a husband, having been sent away [by him]"), thought it was more common among the lower than among the upper classes, but given the political reasons for many aristocratic divorces, they may have been more frequent at that level of society (so I. Kajanto, "On Divorce among the Common People of Rome", *REL* 47.2 (1969), 99–113, though one of the proofs he offers for divorce and remarriage occurring less often among the lower orders is that he cannot find any stepmothers on the inscriptions (p. 106)—not surprising, given that he thinks the Latin for stepmother is *vitrica!*

[145] The inscription is not without difficulty: although the age of the son suggests free birth rather than freedman status, the father's name is given simply as Hypnus and the mother's as Prima. Perhaps the father, L. Calpurnius Hypnus, has used an abbreviated form of his name. Otherwise, if the father is a slave, the reason for the mother having custody will be that the child is illegitimate: on this, see further below.

of her child,[146] who would thus gain a stepfather.[147]

c) if a woman conceived a child when she herself was of servile status, the child, as a slave, would belong to the mother's owner and might either be retained by him (or her) after the mother's manumission, or else separated from the mother in the event of one of them being transferred to another household. The owner might, however, chose to manumit the child along with the mother, and on her forming a new partnership the child would acquire a stepfather.[148] The only circumstance in which the child would remain in the custody of the male parent (and consequently have the opportunity to gain a stepmother) would be where the father was the woman slave's owner.

The greater frequency of tombs dedicated by stepfathers, as opposed to stepmothers, might possibly be accounted for, then, by there being more of the former type of step-parent having stepchildren in their care. Another consideration is that a stepfather, as a man, might be in better financial position than a stepmother to pay the expenses of the funeral on the mother's behalf, or at least make a contribution. This may have been the case in the 9 inscriptions in which a stepfather is named along with the mother as the donor of a child's tomb.[149]

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[146] Because an illegitimate child, taking its mother's name and status, was regarded as belonging to her rather than to the father.

[147] E.g. *CIL* 6.20460 is an inscription set up for their daughter Julia Felicitas (age 8) by D. Avonius Epaphra, Avonius Eurytus, and Julia Iole. A likely scenario is that the mother (free or freed) had the child by one of the Avonii when he was a still a slave (he was subsequently manumitted, perhaps after he split with the mother); the child, being free but illegitimate, took her mother's name, and went with her when she formed a new partnership with the other Avonius. If the father was free or freed, rather than a slave, the coincidence of the mother's and daughter's gentile names indicates illegitimacy and this explains why the mother took the child with her when she formed the second partnership. Another case is *CIL* 6.9041, by the imperial freedman P. Aelius Telesphorus for his wife Naevia Tyche, and (among others) his stepson Naevius Successus. This stepson may be Naevia's illegitimate child from a former relationship with a slave, Successus, born after she had been freed (alternatively, she may have been free born). There is, however, another possibility, namely that Naevia was the freedwoman of a Naevius, to whom she was married, and that she kept their son with her after the death of her patron/husband.

[148] E.g. *CIL* 6.10163, by Hyacinthus for his partner Claudia Thallusa, an imperial freedwoman, and her daughter Thallia (presumably a slave) and 6.10925, where Itharus, an imperial freedman, has a stepson Victor (presumably a slave) and a wife Aelia Iucunda (presumably an imperial freedwoman whose son was born while she was a slave).

[149] In two of these there is another reason—in 13.2036 the stepfather has adopted his stepson and in 8.8937 the stepfather is also the paternal uncle.

The preponderance of stepfathers over stepmothers in the inscriptions set up *for* a stepfather by a stepchild presents greater difficulties of interpretation. In a second marriage as well as a first, the husband would be likely to predecease his wife, in which case he would be commemorated as husband rather than stepfather. We might, therefore, expect there to be less tombs for stepfathers than for stepmothers, just as there are less tombs for fathers than for mothers.[150] If, on the other hand, the hypothesis is correct that there were a greater number of custodial stepfathers than stepmothers in the population overall, this might balance out the fact that husbands tended to die before their wives. Obviously, it is impossible to arrive at a definite position. All we can say is that the greater number of tombs erected for stepfathers than for stepmothers may indicate that bonds of affection between stepfathers and stepchildren were more common than with stepmothers, but that this is not the only possible explanation.

Although statistics alone are inconclusive, there are other factors, however, which suggest that relationships with stepfathers were better than those with stepmothers. For example, there are four inscriptions in which a stepfather is commemorated by his wife together with his stepchild; on one occasion (10.5687) the stepson has been made joint heir with the wife.[151] In the case of tombs dedicated by stepfathers to stepchildren, a slightly greater degree of sentimentality is displayed by the stepfather than by his female counterpart.[152] Although there is little significant difference between stepmothers and stepfathers in terms of bare figures,[153] stepfathers make use of a much greater variety of terms, including strongly affectionate superlatives

[150] In the *CIL* sample of 1000 inscriptions, there are 38 for mothers as opposed to 17 for fathers.

[151] By contrast, there are no inscriptions set up for a wife by her husband and stepchild together, although, as pointed out earlier, it is not necessarily a sign of bad relations if there are none, because statistically we would not expect any.

[152] In the case of tombs set up for a stepfather, however, terms of endearment are employed on only 4 occasions, though the term *dulcissimus* ('dearly-loved') occurs once at least. This means that stepfathers receive an epithet in only 33% of cases, a figure not very different from that for stepmothers. (By contrast, in the *CIL* sample, fathers receive an epithet in 71% of cases).

[153] Stepfathers give their stepchild an epithet in 43% of cases, stepmothers in 6 cases out of 14 (or 16 including the two uncertain ones). Note, however, that the gap between stepfathers and fathers (who use an epithet in 60% of the cases surveyed) is less prominent than that between stepmothers and mothers (68% of the latter employ an epithet).

such as *optimus* ('best'), *dulcissimus* ('dearly-loved'), *carissimus* ('dearest') and *suavissimus* ('most sweet').[154] As might be expected, the term *vitricus*, not possessing the connotations of *noverca*, is not avoided to the same extent. Half the stepchildren who erect tombs for their stepfathers refer to the deceased step-parent as *vitricus*. On the other hand, it is interesting that stepfathers, like stepmothers, show a certain reluctance to refer to themselves as such: there are only 8 cases (i.e. 18%) in which the term *vitricus* is employed by a stepfather (fathers, by contrast, refer to themselves as *pater* ('father') in 47% of the examples).

It was observed above that female stepchildren are rare in inscriptions involving stepmothers and that this may reflect the difficulties of the stepmother/stepdaughter relationship. The same is not true in the case of stepfathers, who receive monuments from stepdaughters in 1/3 of the inscriptions, the same percentage as for tombs set up to a father by a daughter. Stepfathers commemorate stepdaughters in 20 cases, (46%: again, the proportion is the same for tombs by father for daughters).

Finally, although relationships with stepfathers seem to have been more harmonious than those with stepmothers, it is noteworthy that there are only 4 cases where a stepfather includes both a child and a stepchild in a tomb.[155] As with stepmothers, this suggests that good relations are not common unless the step-parent has no child of their own.

To summarise. Although the statistics for inscriptions involving stepfamilies are too small to allow absolute certainty, and despite the various conflicting elements discussed above, some conclusions may be drawn. While affectionate relationships between stepmothers and stepchildren did occur, they may not have been the norm. The study of the inscriptions has revealed glimpses if not of actual conflict, at least of lukewarm feelings between stepmothers and their stepchildren. Stepmothers—who refrain from referring to themselves as *noverca*—are reluctant to be named on the tomb of a stepchild as donor along with the child's father, and a stepchild is usually only included

[154] 19 cases, many of them strong: in 13.2036 and 6.38831, the stepchild has been adopted by the stepfather (13.2036 is a particularly elaborate tomb): both of these, and 2 other cases, have the epithet *dulcissimus*; other epithets used are *bm/mer.* '(well-) deserving' (6 examples), *optimus* (1), *carissimus* (3), *suavissimus* (1), *pientissimus* 'most dutiful' (1), *piissimus* 'most dutiful' (2) *incomparabilis* 'incomparable' (1).

[155] 3.7984 (for wife, daughter and stepdaughter), 6.3541 (for wife, daughter and stepson), 6.9041 and 14.339 (both family tombs for self, wife son(s) and stepson).

in a family tomb with a stepmother and her husband if the couple have no children of their own. Stepfamily tensions are not, however, to be attributed solely to the stepmother. Among stepchildren, those of the female sex in particular show a reluctance to erect a monument for their stepmothers. And stepchildren, in contrast to sons and daughters, conspicuously fail to employ expressions of genuine sentiment in their dedications. Stepfathers too, seem to have had good relations with stepchildren mainly in cases where there were no children of their own; on the other hand, there is some evidence that warm relationships occurred more often than with stepmothers, especially between stepfathers and stepdaughters. Finally, the inscriptions are important in that they direct attention away from the upper classes with whom the literary texts are exclusively concerned, to the lower ranks of society, for whom the inheritance issue was not of such overriding importance, and they provide some evidence that conflicts with stepmothers often had more to do with daily life within the family than with disputes over property and inheritance.[156]

6. *Conclusion: relationship between the stereotype of the saeva noverca and Roman social realities*

The literary figure of the stepmother in her peculiarly Roman manifestation, that is, a poisoner who removes her stepson in order to obtain the inheritance for her own child or for herself, is rarely encountered in real life. This does not mean, however, that the *saeva noverca* is a creation of fantasy divorced from social reality.[157] Rather, the stereotype may be regarded as the expression in fictional form of fears on the part of the wealthier classes for the inheritance prospects of the children in the event of a father remarrying. These fears, which flourished in a society where divorce, remarriage and the presence of stepmothers was a commonplace occurrence, were in turn the product of a variety of factors: deriving in part from real instances of stepmothers who induced their husbands to favour either themselves or their children in their wills,[158] they were to a greater

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[156] In other words, the sort of stepfamily tensions discussed by modern sociologists, which I have dealt with more fully in chapter 3.

[157] As was argued by Jolowitz (1947), 90; cf. Treggiari (1991a) 394.

[158] Through disinheritance of the stepchildren in extreme cases only; more often by leaving the stepchildren a lesser, but legally irreproachable, share.

extent the result of a negative attitude towards the stepmother entertained at all levels of society. This attitude had some basis in actual tensions within stepfamilies,[159] tensions which, at least on the evidence of the inscriptions, might have been more common where a stepmother, rather than a stepfather, was raising stepchildren,[160] and also where the stepchild was female.[161] As with the Greeks, however, the Roman view of the stepmother was biased in its attribution of blame for conflict to the stepmother alone. As we have seen, there is evidence, both from the inscriptions and from historical examples, that stepchildren resented their stepmothers as much as the reverse. And stepfathers must have sometimes been guilty of the kind of legacy-hunting behaviour with which Apuleius was charged.[162] The bias must be explained in terms of commonly held misogynistic views about women in general.[163]

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[159] Cf. Bradley (1991a) 162 "the stereotype of the wicked stepmother should be allowed to derive from the widely experienced tensions between child and step-parent that frequent remarriage created".

[160] This is supported by contemporary research (see discussion in Chapter 3). Some recent studies, e.g. Ochiltree (1990), deny that stepfamily troubles are as common in reality as the stereotype of the stepmother suggests, but since nowadays the majority of custodial step-parents are men, this might confirm that there is less chance of conflict when the children are being raised by a stepfather.

[161] On the contrast between reality and the Roman stereotype of the persecuted stepson, see above n. 128.

[162] Cf. n. 89 above.

[163] Much of our discussion (chapter 3) in connection with Athens applies to Rome as well e.g. attitudes to female sexuality (cf. the Valerius passage discussed above): see Richlin (1983), passim; for treachery as womanly ('muliebris fraus') cf. Liv., 8.18.6., Tac., *Ann.* 2.71.2. On stereotypic attitudes to woman in Rome cf. Bauman (1992) 10–12. In the case of the Roman *saeva noverca*, the prominence of the poisoning theme also links stepmothers to women as a class, poisoning being the woman's crime *par excellence* (cf. the passages from Livy and Tacitus cited above which both refer to this).

CHAPTER SIX

HISTORICAL FIGURES: LIVIA, AGRIPPINA AND OCTAVIA

The three most famous portraits of a Roman stepmother—Tacitus' portrayal of Livia and Agrippina, and Plutarch's of Octavia, sister of Augustus, are all heavily influenced by the literary stereotype of the *saeva noverca*. The depiction of Livia as a poisoning stepmother is pure fiction; the stepmotherly qualities of Agrippina, though she closely resembles the stereotype in many ways, are exaggerated; in the case of Octavia, by contrast, the fact that she does not act in accordance with the behaviour expected of a stepmother is exploited in order to turn her into a paradigm of womanly and stepmotherly rectitude.

A. *Livia*

In the first book of the *Annals* Tacitus describes Augustus' wife Livia as "an oppressive mother to the nation, an oppressive stepmother to the house of the Caesars."[1] Although the historian is here ostensibly reporting criticisms made against Augustus after his death, the remark is consistent with his portrayal of Livia in general, and receives some support in the accounts of Dio Cassius[2] and, to a lesser extent, Suetonius.

Seen from the advantage of hindsight, Livia's family circumstances certainly resemble a classic 'stepmother' situation.[3] Married to a man with a child (Julia) from a previous marriage,[4] having two sons from her own first marriage[5] but no surviving offspring from the second, she lived to see the elder of her two sons, Tiberius, enter into the

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[1] *Ann.* 1.10.5 "gravis in rem publicam mater, gravis domui Caesarum noverca".

[2] For Dio presenting Livia as stepmother: 55.32.2 (Agrippa Postumus spoke ill of Livia as a stepmother).

[3] For the historical Livia see Kornemann (1942) 179–221, Balsdon (1962) 68ff., Purcell (1986), Bauman (1992) 102–5, 124–29, 131–38.

[4] On her marriage to Octavian in 38BC, Livia became stepmother to a one-year-old girl, Julia, the child of Augustus' first marriage to Scribonia.

[5] At the time of her marriage to Augustus, Tiberius was three years old, while the younger son, Drusus, was born three months after the wedding.

inheritance of his stepfather. In the meantime, others with greater claims died young and unexpectedly: these included two sons of her stepdaughter Julia by her second husband Agrippa (Gaius and Lucius) who had been adopted by Augustus when young and brought up in his household as his heirs, and twenty five years earlier, Julia's first husband Marcellus, the nephew of Augustus, rumoured at the time to be his choice as heir. Tiberius achieved supremacy, then, because of the deaths of his competitors. Moreover, after he became emperor in 14 AD his position only became secure after the demise of two others who were potential threats to himself and, as successors after him, to his son Drusus: Agrippa Postumus, younger brother of Gaius and Lucius, adopted by Augustus at the same time as Tiberius (4AD) but exiled in 7AD, and Germanicus, son of Tiberius' brother Drusus, whom Tiberius had himself been compelled to adopt. Of these, the former perished in exile as a result of a mysterious letter which had been sent from the Palace ordering his execution, while Germanicus' death occasioned accusations of murder, one of those involved (Plancina, wife of Piso) being a close friend of Livia.

Clearly much circumstantial evidence was available which could be exploited by the enemies of Livia and Tiberius.Tacitus, Dio and (to a lesser extent) Suetonius, all bear witness to a tradition hostile to Livia in which she becomes a scheming murderess who promotes the interests of her son by systematically destroying all those who stand in his way.[6] Rumours are reported that she was responsible for the deaths of Marcellus, Gaius and Lucius, Augustus himself (to provide Livia with a motive, there was a story that he was about to reinstate the exiled Agrippa Postumus), and Agrippa Postumus. In general, the case against Livia is decidedly suspect.[7] Accusations are always

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[6] The tradition probably started early: see Goodyear (1972) 111; Levick (1976) 271 n. 32, says that most of the crimes imputed to Livia may be credited to the imagination of Scribonia and her supporters, and to other detractors of Tiberius: Livia needed only to exist to incur hatred. Hostility towards Livia would also have been found in the memoirs of Agrippina the Younger, which we know Tacitus to have used in describing an incident in the life of Agrippina's mother (*Ann.* 4.53.2; cf. Questa (1963) 173 and n. 60). This source may underlie especially Tacitus' description of the antagonism between Livia and Agrippina the Elder; in fact, given that the latter was Livia's step-granddaughter, the idea of presenting Livia as a *noverca* may have come from there (cf. Königer (1966) 47).

[7] In the case of Marcellus, the accusation that Livia murdered him is recorded only by Dio (53.33.4), and in the form of a rumour. Tacitus does not even hint that Marcellus was murdered: had he found in his sources any suggestion at all that Livia may have been responsible, he would surely have seized on the opportunity to

presented by Dio or Suetonius in the form of gossip; they do not present a consistent case against Livia; no single author mentions every accusation. It is Tacitus above all who sets out to create a picture of Livia as a wicked stepmother[8]: in lieu of real evidence, however, he relies on rumour and insinuation.[9]

Let us look in detail at Tacitus' methods. Though he does not represent unsubstantiated rumours as the truth, he builds up a picture of Livia which excites prejudice and consequently predisposes the reader to believe the insinuations which he makes. Livia's first appearance in the *Annals* takes the form of a brief reference which, though cleverly thrown off as a passing remark, establishes from the beginning the rôle she is to play. Summarising the main events of Augustus' reign, the historian records the deaths of Gaius and Lucius: when Agrippa died, Lucius Caesar, on his way to the armies in Spain, and Gaius, when returning wounded from Armenia, were both carried off either by premature natural deaths—or by the treachery of their stepmother Livia.[10] Beginning with insinuation, Tacitus now

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add one more black mark against Livia's name. For the other accusations, see discussion below.

[8] For Tacitus' presentation of Livia as *noverca*, cf. Syme (1958) 306ff., Questa (1963) 331f., Königer (1966) 42–50, Rutland (1978), 17–22, Develin (1983), 92–4, G.Vidén, *Women in Roman Literature: Attitudes of authors under the Early Empire* (Göteborg: 1993) 18–24.

[9] On Tacitus' technique of innuendo where facts are lacking see Ryberg (1942), D. Sullivan, "Innuendo and the 'Weighted Alternative' in Tacitus", *CJ* 71 (1975/6), 312–26, Whitehead (1979), Develin (1983). On the use of rumour, see esp. Questa (1963) 65 n. 43 and Shatzman (1974). S.G. Daitz, "Tacitus' Technique of Character Portrayal," *American Journal of Philology* 81 (1960), 52 concludes that in general Tacitus' portrayal of historical figures, especially his villains, is a literary *tour de force*, more akin, by modern standards, to a novel than to a work of history. For ancient historiography in general as a rhetorical, literary genre rather than as history in the modern sense of the term, see most recently Anthony J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London/Sydney: 1988) 197–215.

[10] *Ann.* 1.3.3: "ut Agrippa vita concessit, L. Caesarem euntem ad Hispanienses exercitus, Gaium remeantem Armenia et vulnere invalidum mors fato propera *vel novercae Liviae dolus* abstulit." Goodyear (1972) 111, points out how Tacitus typically manages to give the impression that the more sinister of two alternatives is the right one by placing it in the second and more emphatic position (see also Ryberg (1942), 388f., Syme (1958) 306, Whitehead (1979), 489, Königer (1966) 49f., Develin (1983), 85–7). For the rumour, cf. Dio Cass., 55.10a10. It is almost certainly false: are we to believe that, even though the two grandsons had been adopted as early as the year 17 (and thus the motivation for stepmotherly malevolence had been present since then) and were living in Livia's house, able to be disposed of with comparative ease, she waited until they were grown up, had already held, or were about to hold, magistracies and were away from Rome?

proceeds to record events as if factual.[11] After the deaths of the heirs, Tiberius, as the sole surviving stepson of Augustus, received full powers, including adoption as his son,

> non *obscuris*, ut antea, matris *artibus*, sed palam hortatu. nam senem Augustum devinxerat adeo, uti nepotem unicum, Agrippam Postumum, in insulam Planasiam proieceril, rudem sane bonarum artium et robore corporis stolide ferocem, nullius tamen flagitii compertum *Ann.* 1.3.3–4.

> not, as previously, through the secret wiles of his mother, but through open exhortation. For she had subjugated the elderly Augustus to such an extent that he exiled his only grandson, Agrippa Postumus, to the island of Planasia, a young man who was admittedly unskilled in the gentlemanly arts and stupidly violent in his bodily strength, but who nevertheless had not been found guilty of any crime.

Tiberius' adoption as Augustus' heir is presented as the result of a plot by Livia, the scheming *noverca*, who removes the rightful heirs, the first two by stealth, the third openly. The effect is achieved partly by skilful manipulation of the facts. In the first place, Livia was not in reality the stepmother of Augustus' grandsons: her only stepchild was Julia. The relationship between Livia and her stepdaughter[12] is not, however, of interest to an historian attempting to depict Livia as the *noverca* of the Julian house: a malevolent stepmother's sole concern is to remove rivals to her own son, and there was no reason for Livia to feel personal hostility towards Julia in this connection, since, as a woman, she could not inherit her father's political position; on the contrary, as wife of Tiberius, she could be useful in promoting

[11] On this as a method of Tacitus, see Ryberg (1942), 389f., Syme (1958) 306.

[12] Of Livia's relationship with her stepdaughter Julia little is known. Given the young age at which Julia acquired a stepmother, there is no reason why she could not have regarded Livia as mother. But there are indications that the relationship was not a cordial one, at least on Julia's side. She certainly did not like Livia's son Tiberius, and when eventually forced to marry him was said to have thought she was marrying beneath her. The fact that the fun-loving Julia and the severe and old-fashioned Livia were opposite character types may well have resulted in friction between the two women. Finally, the readiness with which Julia's mother Scribonia, by this time an old lady, accompanied her daughter into exile in 2BC, attests to a warm relationship between mother and daughter, which would be less likely to have flourished had Julia regarded Livia as her mother. Bauman (1992) 125f., suggests that Livia may have been responsible for Julia's exile, under the Augustan adultery laws, in her (unofficial) capacity as *mater patriae* ('mother of her country'); on the other hand, the disgrace of Julia would not have improved the position of Tiberius, as Julia's husband.

the interests of Livia's son. In the case of Julia's three sons by Agrippa, by contrast, though these were only Livia's stepgrandsons,[13] her relationship with them can be portrayed as that of a stepmother in terms of the stereotype of the murderous *noverca*, since any person whom a woman's husband names as heir in preference to her own son can be regarded as a potential target for stepmotherly machinations. Not only is the family connection between Livia and her stepgrandsons misrepresented, but as well the facts of Gaius' and Lucius' deaths and of Postumus' exile are presented by Tacitus in such a way as to depict Livia not only as a scheming *noverca*, but as a stepmother who progresses from intrigue behind the scenes to a more brazenly open course of action as her power over her husband increases. There is also a telescoping of events: the deaths of Gaius and Lucius are mentioned together—in keeping with the insinuations against Livia—though they took place at a distance of two years.[14] Likewise, the adoption of Tiberius and the exile of Postumus are made to appear simultaneous events, so that it can be implied that Tiberius was adopted, on Livia's urging, in preference to the rightful heir Postumus.[15]

Tacitus' achieves his desired effect not only by the manner in which he manipulates the facts but also by the clever choice of language. An initial reference to *dolus novercae* ('the treachery of their stepmother') as merely one possible cause of the princes' deaths is followed by a reference to the *obscurae artes* ('secret arts') of Tiberius' mother. Together these phrases[16] conjure up an image of the sinister *noverca venefica*. This image is reinforced by the reference to Augustus as *senex* ('old man') and the use of the term *devincio* (lit. 'bind to one emotionally') which, taken in conjunction, suggest the familiar situation where an

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[13] They were, of course, also her husband's adopted sons, but this would not make them her stepsons, if a stepson is defined as a child whom one's husband has fathered by another woman.

[14] Lucius in 2AD and Gaius in 4AD. Also, they are presented as if following on immediately after Agrippa's death, though this happened much earlier, in 12BC.

[15] Whereas in fact Agrippa Postumus was also adopted at the same time as Tiberius in 4AD and his banishment did not take place till three years later. Livia of course may have been responsible for the adoption of Tiberius: she had worked for many years to promote Tiberius' career, so that he would be in the position where, if anything happened to the heirs, he would be next in line. But in supporting the interests of her son, she was acting as any ambitious mother would have done. It was merely good luck, rather than stepmotherly machinations, that enabled Tiberius to inherit his stepfather's position.

[16] *Obscurae* suggesting darkness.

old man (Augustus) is married to a younger woman (Livia) who entices him to turn against his own family.[17] The injustice with which Postumus is supposedly treated is further implied by the wording- "nepotem unicum . . . proiecerit . . . nullius tamen flagitii compertum" ("he exiled his only grandson. . . . who nevertheless had not been found guilty of any crime"). Tacitus cannot get way from the fact that Postumus was unprepossessing, but he presents the fact here as something unimportant, since that suits his purposes, and suggests that as Augustus' only grandson he should not have been exiled without cause and that Augustus only did this because he was an old man under the domination of his wife.[18]

The portrayal of Livia as stepmother is continued in the next event recorded by Tacitus in which she is concerned—the death of Augustus and the succession of Tiberius (*Ann.* 1.5). The bare facts are these: Augustus was old; he fell ill at Nola. Tiberius, the heir, was summoned. The death of Augustus and the succession of Tiberius[19] were made public simultaneously. Shortly afterwards it was reported that Agrippa Postumus had been killed by his guard, who claimed to have received a letter ordering the execution. Tiberius publicly denied sending the letter.

In Tacitus' version, this basic information is turned into a drama of murder and stepmotherly intrigue with Livia as the star player. The sinister rôle to be allotted to Livia is prepared for in an introductory section (*Ann.* 1.4) which describes the sort of talk (described as *rumores* 'rumours') that was taking place among the people, once Augustus began to show a physical decline due to old age, about a suitable successor. Two names were mentioned—Agrippa Postumus and Tiberius. Agrippa was dismissed as a savage without either the

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[17] Cf. the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will') in Pliny (*Ep.* 6.33) discussed in chapter 5: the obvious flaw is that Livia is not young and that the marriage is of long standing.

[18] Contrast his statements about Postumus later on: in the discussions after Augustus' death about a successor, Agrippa is branded as *trux* 'violent' (*Ann.* 1.4.3). As Tacitus himself later admits (1.6.2), it was due to *Augustus'* complaints about the *mores* ('character') of Postumus that the young man was exiled by the senate. For Livia exiling Postumus *novercali odio* cf. Pseudo-Victor, *Epit.* 1.27, cited by Syme (1978) 150.

[19] According to Tacitus, "simul excessisse Augustum et rerum potiri Neronem fama eadem tulit" ("the same talk had it that Augustus was dead and at the same time Nero was in charge of the state"): this was in fact true, since Tiberius, on Augustus' death, held the legal powers necessary to act as Princeps; his position, however, was only formally confirmed by the Senate at a meeting held a month later: see Syme (1974), 485f.

years or the training needed for imperial responsibilities; it was agreed that Tiberius was the more suitable in terms of his experience, but reservations were expressed about his nature and the bad influence of his mother.[20] Immediately after this reference to Livia comes the narration of Augustus' end, which begins with mention of a deterioration in his health and the rumour that Livia was responsible. This suspicion is validated by supplying a plausible motive: the fear that Augustus was about to reinstate Agrippa Postumus. A description follows of Augustus' visit to Agrippa Postumus in exile, accompanied only by Paullus Fabius Maximus, and their tearful reunion. Credence is further reinforced by the story that at the funeral of Maximus (who died shortly after: perhaps, suggests Tacitus, by his own hand?), his wife was heard reproaching herself for his death—the obvious explanation was that Maximus' wife had informed Livia, but that Augustus had discovered the betrayal. The death of Augustus itself is surrounded with an aura of secrecy and suspicious circumstances: Tiberius was summoned hastily by a letter from his mother; it was not known whether Augustus was still alive by the time his successor arrived on the scene, for Livia had sealed off the house and streets with guards, and optimistic bulletins about Augustus' health were circulated from time to time ("laetique interdum nuntii vulgabantur"). Eventually word ('fama') got out that Augustus had died and Tiberius was in charge.[21] The mood is continued in the description of the death of Agrippa Postumus, which, in order to reinforce the theme of murder, is presented as the first *crime* of the new regime and made to follow on immediately after the news of Augustus' death. Again, scheming and conspiracy are the order of the day—the mysterious letter, the attempt to cast the blame on Tiberius and Livia conspiring together, Tiberius through fear and Livia *novercalibus odiis* ('through stepmotherly hatred').

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[20] Note that she is referred to (*Ann.* 1.4.3–5) as 'matrem muliebri impotentia' ('a mother with a woman's wilfulness')—an exploitation of male prejudice against women (cf. Rutland (1978), 17–22, who points out that the qualities assigned to Livia, especially *impotentia* ('wilfulness') and *fraus* ('treachery') are also those commonly ascribed by the author to women in general). For *impotentia* as a prominent characteristic of Livia, see also Koestermann (1963) and Goodyear (1972) on 1.4.5. The word as used by Tacitus suggests not merely lack of self-control (its more usual meaning) but the 'violent assertion of self-will': cf. Furneaux (1896) Vol I p. 582.

[21] *Ann.* 1.5.3–4. Note the use of *vulgabantur* and *fama* ('talk, rumour'), which conjure up an image of the people being kept in ignorance and only gaining information through gossip that was circulated.

On a first reading, the narration carries its own dramatic impetus and apparent consistency. It is mostly based on rumour and suggestion: there are few actual facts. Apart from the failing of Augustus' health, the death of Fabius Maximus, the summoning to Rome of Tiberius, and the announcement of Augustus' death, the rest is probably fabrication.[22] But it is cleverly presented as a mixture of truth and rumour/insinuation. Even events offered as factual are given a sinister implication by the manner in which they are incorporated into the narrative. For instance, although it was perfectly natural for the mother of Augustus' heir to send for him when the emperor fell dangerously ill, so that he could be ready to take over, Livia's letter recalling Tiberius is presented as part of her intrigues: Tiberius must be in Italy so that he can be secretly pushed onto the throne before anyone knows what is happening. As to the many elements in the story presented by Tacitus as hearsay, one serves to corroborate another, and the total effect of these is to inspire belief.[23] A series of rumours, beginning with the talk among the people about a successor for Augustus and the jibe that Rome was in danger of being enslaved to a woman (described as the gossip current at the time), and continuing with the supposed visit of Augustus to Agrippa Postumus and the ensuing circumstances surrounding the death of Maximus, builds up a convincing case against Livia, so that the description of her intrigues to place Tiberius safely on the throne-presented as factual—can be more readily accepted as the truth. After all this, the suggestion that Livia and Tiberius must have been behind the death of Postumus is also more believable; note that Tacitus here reinforces the motif of the scheming stepmother by referring to Tiberius, Augustus' son by adoption, as his stepson.

On closer inspection, of course, the narrative contains inconsistencies and improbabilities. If Augustus was so old and frail,[24] how could

[22] Not all on the part of Tacitus himself. The story that Augustus regretted exiling Postumus is alluded to by Plut., *Mor.* 508a–b, and Dio Cass., 56.30.1. Dio also mentions Augustus' visit to the island and reports rumours that Livia killed Augustus. The Fabius story is mentioned by Pliny (*Nat.* 7.150) and Plutarch. See Syme (1978) 149ff.

[23] For instance, what Maximus' wife was heard saying is proof of the other things presented as rumour, the suggestion 'perhaps by his own hand' is thrown in casually, in typical Tacitean style, as further corroboration (the implication of course being that Augustus had ordered Maximus to commit suicide because he learnt that Maximus had betrayed him). On Tacitus' use of rumour in this passage, see Goodyear (1972) 125–9, Shatzman (1974), 560–3.

[24] cf. *Ann* 1.4 "Provecta iam senectus aegro et corpore fatigabatur aderatque finis"

he have attempted a voyage to an island with only one companion?[25] And was it really likely that he would have considered reinstating a grandson with no experience of public affairs, and who had been exiled for unsatisfactory behaviour,[26] in preference to a stepson who had been brought up by his stepfather since he was three, had been Augustus' adopted son for 10 years, and who, more importantly, shared with Augustus most of his constitutional powers?[27] The story about Augustus' visit to Agrippa Postumus was probably concocted by Livia's detractors to provide her with a motive for murder.[28] Tacitus' description of the death of Augustus itself is suspiciously similar in some respects[29] to his narration of Agrippina's behaviour after the death of Claudius. The scenario has a much greater air of veracity in the latter case, where Agrippina had a good reason for murdering her husband and withholding the information, given that the claims of her son to the throne were dubious and his accession depended on the support of the Praetorian Guard.[30]

("now advanced in years, he was also afflicted with bodily illness and his end was approaching"): this before the decline attributed to Livia at 1.5.

[25] See, for instance, Furneaux (1896) Vol 1 p. 186, M.P. Charlesworth, "Tiberius and the death of Augustus", *AJP* 44 (1923), 149, Shatzman (1974), 562 n. 45, Syme (1978) 149f. and *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford: 1986) 415. The story is accepted by some as factual (e.g. K. Von Fritz, "Tacitus, Agricola, Domitian and the Problem of the Principate", *CPh* 52 (1957), 77, 81f., 93–5, Levick (1976) 64f., 245 n. 66., though she does not accept it as proof that Augustus changed his mind).

[26] The criticism of Postumus which Tacitus attributes to the people in the passage immediately preceding (a savage without either the years or the training needed for imperial responsibilities) does not fit in with the idea of Augustus wanting to reinstate him: given Augustus' political astuteness, a decision to reinstate an obviously unsatisfactory individual would need some explanation, such as that the emperor was in his dotage, yet Tacitus does not suggest this.

[27] The previous year he had his tribunician power renewed; in all the provinces and armies he had equal power to Augustus (Vell. Pat., 2.121.1; Syme (1939) 437, (1974), 485f.). Shatzman (1974), 561 points out also the improbability of the debate among the people about whether Agrippa Postumus or Tiberius would be a suitable heir which precedes the description of Augustus' death: at this stage Tiberius was the undisputed successor, and the introduction of Agrippa as a possible candidate and rival of Tiberius is simply part of Tacitus' picture of Tiberius' succession being due to his mother's plotting: such a plot would have no point in the absence of a rival candidate.

[28] Cf. Charlesworth and Shatzman cited in n. 25 above.

[29] In particular, the detail of the use of guards by Livia and Agrippina to prevent access to the sick emperor, the putting out of rumours that his case was hopeful, and the delaying of the announcement of the death until the successor desired by the wife—her son—is ready to take over.

[30] Whereas in the case of Livia, her husband, to whom she had been married for over 50 years, was old and sick, and the way had been carefully prepared for a smooth transmission of power to his recognized heir Tiberius. The similarity in the

Finally, the death of Agrippa Postumus. It is possible that the order for the execution came from Augustus himself, with the idea of strengthening the position of Tiberius as well as ensuring the smooth transition of power without a rival claimant who could perhaps act as a rallying point for opposition to Tiberius.[31] Whatever the truth, the point is that Tacitus presents the facts in such as way as to cast maximum blame on Livia, the scheming stepmother.[32]

In describing the demeanour of Tiberius in the Senate immediately after Augustus' death, Tacitus once more reinforces his picture of Livia exerting her sinister influence (*Ann.* 1.7): Tiberius, dissimulating, "conceded to public opinion that he should appear to have been summoned and chosen by the state rather than to have stolen his way in through the intrigues of a wife and the adoption of an old man" ("dabat et famae ut vocatus electusque potius a re publica videretur quam per uxorium ambitum et senili adoptione inrepisse"). Note the suggestive choice of language: the verb *inrepo* ('steal in') suggest slow stealth; *senilis* ('of an old man') like *senex* in 1.3.3 (discussed above), portrays Augustus as a helpless old man under the influence of his wife; *ambitus* is a term with derogatory connotations.[33]

Yet another opportunity for a jibe at Livia is provided by the comments on Augustus supposedly made after his death. Two opposing views are offered by the historian: the less favourable includes criticism of Augustus' private life, the culmination of which is the following: "postremo Livia gravis in rem publicam mater, gravis domui Caesarum noverca" ("finally [there was] Livia, an oppressive mother to the nation, an oppressive stepmother to the house of the Caesars" *Ann.* 1.10.5).[34]

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stories might, however, be coincidental: so Syme (1978) 151, and "How Tacitus wrote Annals I–III" in *Roman Papers* Vol. 3 ed. A.R. Birley (Oxford: 1984) 1036 and n. 72 (= *Historiographia Antiqua* (1977) 257): 'when an emperor dies, similar situations recur'); also Seif (1973) 295f., Bauman (1992) 127f. Tacitus' account is confirmed by Dio Cass., 56.31.1; cf. Suet., *Tib.* 22.

[31] Cf. Syme (1939) 439, Levick (1976) 65–7.

[32] Rutland (1978), 19, points out that whereas Tacitus indicates his personal belief in Livia's guilt, the other sources merely present it as rumour (Suet., *Tib.* 22, Dio Cass., 57.3.6). Also, the murder of Postumus is given special prominence by being presented as the first crime of the new regime.

[33] *Ambitus* (which I have translated 'intrigues') means literally 'going around'; often it refers to candidates canvassing for office by illegal means such as bribery (in contrast to *ambitio*, used of legally conducted campaigning).

[34] For discussion of this passage, see Ryberg (1942), 387, Syme (1958) 272–3, N.P. Miller, "Style and content in Tacitus" in *Tacitus*, ed. T.A. Dorey (London: 1969) 99ff.

We come now to the death of Germanicus, the last of those who stood as serious rivals to the claims of Livia's son Tiberius. Many, including Germanicus himself, were of the belief that he was the victim of poison administered by Piso, the governor of Syria, together with his wife Plancina. Though both were charged with murder, the charge was not made to stick. Tiberius, according to Suetonius, was suspected of being behind Germanicus' death, though this was merely rumour.[35] In a death-bed scene (*Ann.* 2.71), Tacitus has Germanicus accuse Piso and Plancina of employing poison and witchcraft to secure his end, but though he privately warns Agrippina of the enmity of Tiberius, nothing is said about Livia. It would seem, then, that this was one murder of which Livia was not at the time accused. Nonetheless, Tacitus manages by insinuations and reported rumours to suggest Livia's involvement.[36] In particular, the stepmother theme is exploited for this purpose: given that Germanicus was widely believed to have died through the stepmotherly weapon of poison, Tacitus can exploit the image of Livia as stepmother which he has already established, in order to suggest her complicity in this crime too.[37]

Tacitus' highly favourable[38] portrait of Germanicus begins with his rôle in quelling the mutiny in Germany shortly after the death of Augustus. Contrasting the affable nature of Germanicus with the haughtiness and reserve of Tiberius, Tacitus also gives a short account (*Ann.* 1.33) of the family connections of Germanicus in which he lays special emphasis on his marriage to Agrippina, daughter of Julia and Agrippa and thus Livia's stepgrandaughter. Not only was Germanicus hated by his uncle Tiberius and his grandmother Livia, according to Tacitus, because he symbolised people's hopes of a return to a free Republic,[39] but he suffered as a result of the hostility

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[35] Suet., *Tib.* 52. Tacitus also suggests, through insinuation, that Tiberius was implicated: see Shatzman (1974), 563–8.

[36] Cf. Ryberg (1942), 391–6, Develin (1983), 94.

[37] As we shall see, although Tacitus does mention Livia's hatred of Germanicus, he places special emphasis on the relationship between Livia and Agrippina, because this allows him to bring out the stepmother theme (it would be hard to portray Germanicus, Livia's own grandson, as her stepson, whereas Agrippina, as daughter of Julia, was one of Livia's step-grandchildren).

[38] Not all see Tacitus' account as entirely positive: cf., most recently, L.W. Rutland, "The Tacitian Germanicus: Suggestions for a Re-Evaluation", *RhM* 130 (1987), 153.

[39] As son of the popular Drusus and a popular figure himself: it is uncertain whether this hatred existed in reality, but if she was to be implicated in the death of Germanicus, it was necessary to explain why Livia, as his grandmother, turned

between Livia and his wife Agrippina, to whom she displayed the attitude of a stepmother.[40] Notice that the hatred of Livia and Tiberius for Germanicus is described as secret as well as unjust ("occultis in se patrui aviaeque odiis quorum causae acriores quia iniquae" "[Germanicus was anxious because of] the secret hatred against him of his uncle and his grandmother, the reasons for which were all the keener in that they were unjust"): the stress on secrecy contributes further to the theme of Livia as stepmother. Tacitus does not hide Agrippina's strong-willed and passionate temperament, on the contrary, he presents it as having been turned to advantage through her fidelity and love for her husband:[41] it adds to the picture of two women of strong character who come into conflict because of their ambitions for their husband and son respectively.

The passage just discussed, by emphasising Livia's stepmotherly relationship to Agrippina, prepares the way for the rôle Livia is to be given in the death of Germanicus, the circumstances surrounding which are described at length in *Ann.* 2.69ff. In order to implicate Livia, Tacitus draws attention to her friendship with Plancina, Piso's wife and, allegedly, his accomplice in the murder of Germanicus. As a preliminary, when discussing the purpose of Piso's Syrian command (*Ann.* 2.43), Tacitus had pointed to the link between this and Livia's supposed hatred of Agrippina: some believed Piso had received secret instructions from Tiberius to the effect that he had been sent to Syria in order to keep Germanicus' ambitions in check: Piso's wife Plancina had certainly received advice from her friend Livia, who, inspired by feminine jealousy, wanted to persecute Agrippina.[42] Notice again the emphasis on secrecy; Tiberius is implicated only by

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against him: this explanation and the stepmotherly connection with Agrippina reinforce each other.

[40] "Accedebant muliebres offensiones novercalibus Liviae in Agrippinam stimulis" *Ann.* 1.33.3.

[41] *Ann.* 1.33.3: "... nisi quod castitate et mariti amore quamvis indomitum animum in bonum vertebat" ("... except that through her fidelity and love for her husband she gave a good direction to a temper however ungovernable").

[42] *Ann.* 2.43.4 "credidere quidam data et a Tiberio occulta mandata; et Plancinam haud dubie Augusta monuit aemulatione muliebri Agrippinam insectandi" "some believed that secret instructions had also been given by Tiberius; and doubtless Augusta (Livia) advised Plancina, through womanly jealousy, to attack Agrippina." (On the interpretation of the Latin, see Furneaux, Koestermann and Goodyear ad loc.). D.C.A. Shotter, "Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso, Legate of Syria", *Historia* 23 (1974), 241f. suggests that Livia used Plancina as her tool to provoke the hot-heated Agrippina into an untenable position.

suggestion ('credidere quidam' 'some believed'), whereas Livia's part is stated as fact ('haud dubie' 'undoubtedly'). Further, Livia's hostility is here represented as directed not at Germanicus but at her 'stepdaughter' Agrippina. When the death of Germanicus is narrated at a later stage, the ground has been prepared for the reader's acceptance of Livia's part. To make sure that the point is not missed, Tacitus reminds us, when describing how news of Germanicus' final illness reached Rome, of the friendship between Livia and Plancina: people at the time started talking about Livia's private talks with Plancina—the reason for which was now obvious (*Ann.* 2.82.1). Like Livia's message to Tiberius when Augustus was on his deathbed, there was nothing strange about her meeting with a close friend; Tacitus, however, takes this and several other innocent activities and puts a sinister construction on them in order to back up the impression of Livia as a scheming murderess. The fact that Livia defended Plancina when the latter was accused of being her husband's accomplice in the murder of Germanicus is also regarded as suspicious, this interpretation being emphasised by relating how all decent people were criticizing Livia for defending the woman who had obviously murdered her grandson.[43] Earlier, Livia's failure to join in the public lamentation when Germanicus' ashes arrived in Rome had also been given a sinister interpretation: one reason suggested by Tacitus for the non-appearance of both Livia and Tiberius was fear that their insincerity would be detected on their faces. The absence of Germanicus' mother Antonia from the public mourning is seized on: maybe ill-health or excess of grief prevented her, Tacitus admits, but then he goes on to suggest that Tiberius and Livia kept her forcibly at home so that their own failure to attend would seem less suspicious.

Let us turn now to the downfall of Agrippina, culminating in her

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[43] *Ann.* 3.17.2: they added, sarcastically, "proinde venena et artes tam feliciter expertas verteret in Agrippinam, in liberos eius, egregiamque aviam ac patruum sanguine miserrimae domus exsatiaret" ("so let her turn her poisons and wiles, so successfully tested, against Agrippina and against her children, and sate an excellent grandmother and uncle with the blood of a most wretched house"). The implication is that Tiberius and Livia protected Plancina because they had used her services as poisoner to remove Germanicus, against whom, together with his family, they harboured an unjust and unnatural enmity. Livia is called *avia* ('grandmother') (and Tiberius *patruus* 'uncle') to emphasise her family relationship to Germanicus and the unnaturalness of her hostility, but the reference to 'venena et artes' ('poisons and wiles') suggests the theme of the poisoning and scheming *noverca*.

exile. In view of Tacitus' hostile portrayal of Livia, the limited rôle which she is made to play in the misfortunes of Agrippina after the death of Germanicus is unexpected and might appear inconsistent.[44] Although one further reference is made to Livia's long-standing hatred of Agrippina (*Ann.* 4.12.3), it is only mentioned in order to show how it was exploited by Sejanus, who relied on Livia's feelings about Agrippina to convince her, and hence Tiberius, that Agrippina was plotting against the emperor.[45] Livia is at this point no more than a pawn of the ambitious Sejanus; it is not to Livia but to Sejanus, along with Tiberius (who is accused of trying to poison Agrippina), that the fall of Germanicus' family is attributed. Moreover, after the death of Sejanus, the continuing attack on Agrippina and her eventual exile is laid at the door of Tiberius. In fact, Agrippina was not exiled until after Livia's death, a circumstance which Tacitus actually attributes to the restraining effect of Livia on Tiberius: the letter dispatched to Rome condemning Agrippina to banishment arrived so soon after the Augusta's death that people thought it had been sent earlier and had been supressed by her (*Ann.* 5.3.1). The failure of Livia to exploit the opportunity to dispose of her old enemy by banishment would seem to indicate that Livia, though she was undoubtedly no friend of Agrippina, was not as actively hostile to her as Tacitus had earlier indicated.[46] This is likewise suggested by the fact that she aided Julia in exile (see below), and by the story (Suetonius *Caligula* 7) that when one of the children of Agrippina and Germanicus died as a child, Livia dedicated a statue of him dressed as Cupid in the temple of Capitoline Venus.

It might be noted, however, that though Tacitus is unable[47] to

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[44] Though, as Prof. Hoyos points out, it is not so surprising in the light of Tacitus' methods elsewhere: he often tones down a critical character portrayal once the person is nearing their end: cf. Otho and Vitellius in *Histories* 2 and 3 respectively, as well as Agrippina the Younger and Seneca later in the *Annals*.

[45] For this purpose he used Mutilia Prisca, a close friend of Livia (*Ann.* 4.12.4).

[46] Cf. J.E. Phillips, "Roman Mothers and the Lives of Their Adult Daughters", *Helios* 6 (1978), 76., Dixon (1988) 157. She was old and sick by this time, it is true, and perhaps had become indifferent; on the other hand, if she had been as hostile to Agrippina as Tacitus suggests, a more consistent mode of behaviour at this point would have been quiet acquiescence in Tiberius' treatment of her erstwhile enemy rather than an active attempt to prevent her exile.

[47] Presumably he found in his sources no hint that Livia was implicated in Agrippina's exile, otherwise he would have inevitably exploited it. Instead, he uses the fact that Livia was not responsible for the exile to demonstrate how Livia exercised a dominating, but restraining, influence on her son and how his behaviour deteriorated after her death.

implicate Livia in the exile of Agrippina, the manner in which he presents the information is not flattering to Livia: Tiberius, he says, refrained from exiling Agrippina before his mother's death because of his "inveteratum erga matrem obsequium" ("longstanding/ingrained obedience towards his mother"), after her death he was as it were freed from the reins (*Ann.* 5.3.1). Though *obsequium* ('obedience') would normally be a positive virtue, here the implication is that the son was under the influence of a domineering mother. Furthermore, the suggestion that Livia had stopped the letter of exile from being sent is attributed to the belief of the *vulgus* ('the common people')—does Tacitus mean to imply an alternative possibility?[48] Moreover, while admitting that Livia gave aid to Agrippina's sister, Julia the younger, during her twenty years of exile, Tacitus uses the information as an excuse for a further nasty jibe at Livia in her stepmotherly rôle ("she ruined her stepchildren secretly when they were flourishing, but showed them pity openly when their fortunes were at a low ebb").[49]

The passages just discussed demonstrate that Tacitus' hostility towards Livia is so unremitting that even where he records admirable behaviour on her part, praise is tempered with criticism. A final example of this is the notice of Livia's death at the beginning of Book 5. In referring to Livia's marriage to Augustus, Tacitus dwells not on the aspects for which the union was renowned—its length and (at least on Livia's part) fidelity, but rather on its beginnings, which he presents as the hasty abstraction of a pregnant wife from her husband by a lover overwhelmed by her beauty (*Ann.* 5.1.2 "Caesar cupidine formae aufert marito, incertum an invitam, adeo properus, ut ne spatio quidem ad enitendum dato penatibus suis gravidam induxerit" "through lust for her beauty Caesar (Augustus) stole her from her husband, perhaps not against her will, so precipitately that without even giving her time to have her baby he brought her into

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[48] Cf. Questa (1963) 158, who argues that Tacitus' portrayal of Livia is not really inconsistent.

[49] *Ann.* 4.71.4 "florentes privignos cum per occultum subvertisset, misericordiam erga adflictos palam ostentabat": note the use of *privignos* to refer to Julia, Livia's step-grandaughter (and her brothers, by implication) and the contrast between 'per occultum' ('secretly') and 'palam' ('openly')—stealth is characteristic of the malevolent stepmother; it is also suggested by *palam* that her kindness, which she could afford when her stepchildren were no longer a threat to her, was an act of hypocrisy designed to win her public approval (cf. also the contrast "non obscuris... artibus/ palam hortatu" ("not through secret... wiles/but by open exhortation") at *Ann.* 1.3.3, referred to earlier).

his home while still pregnant"). Although Augustus receives most of the blame for the incident, the addition of 'incertum an invitam' (lit. 'it is uncertain whether she was unwilling' i.e. 'perhaps not against her will') is significant. Since Livia was renowned for the uprightness and severity of her personal life and that of her household, Tacitus cannot justly make accusations on this score, accordingly he makes the most of the opportunity provided by the circumstances of Livia's marriage to insert the insinuating aside 'incertum an invitam': while Livia's complicity is left in doubt, the fact that its possibility is countenanced casts aspersions on her moral character.[50]

Next, in the manner of an epitaph, Tacitus lists Livia's qualities: "sanctitate domus priscum ad morem, comis ultra quam antiquis feminis probatum, mater impotens, uxor facilis et cum artibus mariti, simulatione filii bene composita" ("in the domestic sphere she cultivated virtue in the time-honoured fashion, she was affable beyond what was approved in women of old, a headstrong mother, a compliant wife, a good match for the intrigues of her husband and the hypocrisy of her son"). Though beginning with unequivocal approval,[51] the list of Livia's 'virtues' becomes increasingly ambivalent. For example, although the quality of *comitas* ('affability') might be laudable in itself, it is implied by the addition of "ultra quam antiquis feminis probatum" ("beyond what was approved in women of old") that for a woman who espoused old-fashioned morality, excessive friendliness was undesirable (in Livia's case, Tacitus might have in mind, for example, the sinister consequences of her familiarity with Plancina).[52] Eventually, Tacitus passes to overt sarcasm.[53] In particular, the epi-

[50] Cf. Develin (1983), 67. This is reinforced by the reference to her beauty, casting her in the rôle of the attractive adulteress. It must also be borne in mind that among the Roman nobility, marriages were normally dissolved and new unions undertaken for political motives: the implication that Livia's change of marital partner was inspired by mere sexual attraction would, to a Roman reader, render the whole affair morally dubious.

[51] "sanctitate domus priscum ad morem": cf. Dio's very favourable obituary (58.2.1–6).

[52] Similarly, with the reference to wifely compliance ('facilitas'): in Dio's account (§5) this virtue is defined as referring in particular to her connivance at her husband's sexual indiscretions (cf. Suet., *Aug.* 71): perhaps Tacitus is covertly alluding to the same thing (so Furneaux (1896) ad loc.). Interestingly, Cicero (*Mur.* 66) contrasts *comitas* and *facilitas* (i.e. the qualities displayed by Livia) on the one hand, with *gravitas* ('seriousness') and *severitas* ('austerity') on the other: the second two qualities were precisely those for which the women of old were noted.

[53] Cf. Koestermann (Vol. 2, 1965) 221, referring to Caligula's alleged nickname for Livia, 'Ulixes stolatus' 'A Ulysses in petticoats' (Suet., *Cal.* 23.2).

thet *impotens* ('headstrong') and the reference to *artes* ('intrigues') and *simulatio* ('hypocrisy') are in keeping with Livia's rôle as stepmother.[54]

I have shown how Tacitus consistently portrays Livia as an evil, scheming woman by exploiting circumstantial evidence, by reporting rumours and by making insinuations. The overall effect is immeasurably enhanced by his repeated evocation of the 'wicked stepmother' stereotype, which because of its invariably negative associations, is ideally suited to this purpose. The figure of Livia the *saeva noverca*, far from being a real-life embodiment of the type, is to a large extent Tacitus' own creation, a masterly combination of the *saeva noverca* as a figure of literature and rhetoric, and of a hostile tradition towards Livia which had been fostered by supporters of the Julian (and anti-Claudian) faction and was able to flourish because she was the mother[55] of an unpopular emperor and above all because she had gained more power than was appropriate for a woman.

B. *Agrippina*

As we saw in the previous chapter, it is Agrippina the Younger whose career as a stepmother most closely resembles the stereotype of the *saeva noverca.* But Tacitus, in his portrayal of Agrippina, also exploits the literary figure in such a way as to make her appear even more stepmotherly than she was in reality.[56]

In particular, stress is laid on the typical stepmotherly trait of cunning. Agrippina's behaviour up till the time that Nero succeeded Claudius is presented systematically as a long-term plot aimed at establishing Nero on the throne. At the beginning of *Annals* 12 (1–2) the claims of the various contenders for the position of Claudius' wife are put forward. It is noteworthy that, whereas Dio represents all three freedmen as supporting Agrippina, Tacitus, by contrast, gives

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[54] As is the reference to her as mother, since stepmotherly behaviour is normally closely associated with a woman's rôle as mother—in Livia's case her alleged murders were directed at those who stood in the the way of the interests of her son.

[55] Noy (1991), 354, suggests that the fact Livia was a model wife and *mother* may have been a factor in her portrayal as stepmother. For the close relationship between the two rôles in Livia's case, see previous note and the quote from Tacitus cited in n. 1; for Livia as 'mater patriae' see Bauman (1992) 129. For the thin dividing line between mother and stepmother in the case of Octavia, see discussion below.

[56] On Agrippina in Tacitus, cf. Königer (1966) 30–40, Rutland (1978), 22–8.

each of the three potential brides a supporter who presents his case in turn: Narcissus argues for Aelia Paetina, Callistus for Lollia Paulina and Pallas for Agrippina. This way of presenting the scene is not just for rhetorical effect.[57] Let us look in greater detail at the arguments put into the mouths of the three freedmen. Narcissus makes the point (12.2.1) that since Paetina has been married to Claudius before and has a daughter by him, she will be less likely to regard Britannicus and Octavia *novercalibus odiis* ('with a stepmother's hatred') since they are *proxima suis pignora* ('the closest children to her own')—hardly persuasive, considering that stepmothers with children of their own are all the more likely to resent their stepchildren! Callistus (12.2.2) argues that since Lollia has no children, she will be *vacua aemulatione* ('free from envy') and will be able to be *privignis parentis loco* ('in the place of a mother to her stepchildren'). In favour of Agrippina, Pallas stresses above all that she will bring to the marriage the grandson of Germanicus, *dignum . . . imperatoria fortuna* ('deserving . . . of imperial status 12.2.3); he also mentions her lineage, her youth and the fact that she has a proven capacity for childbearing.[58] Given the precariousness of life,[59] it might certainly seem a reasonable suggestion that Claudius should take a wife who could produce more children in case anything happened to Britannicus, only about 7 or 8 years old at the time. The argument in favour of Agrippina, though implying her ability to bear future sons, places special emphasis, however, on the son she already has, noting his descent from Germanicus and his suitability for imperial rank. Though such arguments would have appealed to Claudius,[60] in the Tacitean context, however, the speech

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[57] Though it has been regarded as a parody, either of an imperial council (Syme (1958) 539, cited by Seif (1973) 155 in his discussion of the passage), or of the beauty contest on Mt Ida (Ehrhardt (1977), 69).

[58] Treggiari (1991a) 102, suggests that Agrippina's single son was insufficient basis for designating her 'femina expertae fecunditatis' ('a woman of proven fecundity') and that Tacitus may have in mind the fertility record of her mother Agrippina the Elder. But this is unnecessary: the point of the remark is to contrast Agrippina with the other two contenders, the childless Lollia and Paetina, mother of a female child, and to answer the arguments raised in their favour, which were based on their child-bearing record, by stressing that Agrippina, as mother of a son, has a greater chance of producing more sons for the emperor.

[59] Claudius had already lost a son by his first wife as a child; other imperial offspring had died in their teens or twenties: e.g. Augustus' grandsons Gaius and Lucius.

[60] If, as Levick argues (cf. chapter 5 n. 32 above), Claudius himself wanted the marriage in order to enhance his own position, it was precisely Agrippina's descent from Germanicus (and Augustus) that recommended her as a wife.

is charged with irony, since whereas both Narcissus and Callistus base their pleas on the need to avoid imposing a stepmother on Britannicus, the arguments used by Pallas centre on the very situation which could—and did—produce a wicked stepmother, namely the fact that Agrippina has a son by a previous marriage, whose interests she supports over those of her stepson (moreover, the emphasis on Nero's lineage from the popular Germanicus, which hints that he is a more suitable candidate for emperor than Britannicus, was, ironically, an important way in which Agrippina was able to promote her own son over her stepson.)

I suggest that one of Tacitus' reasons for employing the format of a debate over who would become Claudius' next wife, with the opportunity this provided to exploit the stepmother theme, was his desire to portray Agrippina as acting from the first the rôle of *saeva noverca* in the interests of her son. The next occasion on which we meet her in this guise is the adoption of Nero by Claudius (*Ann.* 12. 25–26). In particular, stress is laid on Agrippina's cunning and hypocrisy. Like a typical *noverca*, she resorts to guile, using a third party as her agent: she gets her lover Pallas to urge the adoption on Claudius on the pious pretext of concern that Britannicus should have a protector (12.25.1). The stepmotherly character of these transactions is enhanced by stressing Britannicus' rôle as victim:[61] no one, comments Tacitus, was so lacking in pity as to not be grieved at Britannicus' ill fortune, while the boy himself was bright enough to realise the insincerity of his stepmother's supposed concern for his welfare, especially as he had been deprived of the protection of even his slaves.[62]

After Nero's assumption of the *toga virilis* ('toga of manhood'), Agrippina is shown as beginning her final preparations for placing her son on the throne (12.41). Events are described which may well be factual, but which are recorded in such a way as to emphasise the stepmotherly characteristics of treachery and deceit, here directed

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[61] I.e. in the typical stepson's rôle.

[62] 12.26.2:

> desolatus paulatim (note the suggestion of a plot put into action over a period of time) etiam servilibus ministeriis p<u>er intempestiva novercae officia in ludibrium vertebat, intellegens falsi. neque enim segnem ei fuisse indolem ferunt, sive verum, seu periculis commendatus retinuit famam sine experimento.

having been robbed over a period of time of his attendants, even those of

against Britannicus. All the officers of the guard sympathetic to his plight are removed on trumped-up excuses (12.41.2), some even on the pretext of promotion. She has all the best teachers of Britannicus removed, again through guile: she reports to Claudius an incident where the boy addressed Nero as Domitius, thus by implication refusing to acknowledge Nero's adoption by Claudius (12.41.3). She blames the corrupting influence of his teachers, which, unless means are taken, will have disastrous results: Claudius, alarmed, removes all the best teachers by exile or execution, and places Britannicus under the guardianship (*custodia*) of men selected by his *noverca*.[63] Next, she removes two Prefects of the Guard who are loyal to Messalina and her children, by persuading Claudius that a single commander—her nominee Burrus—will make for stronger discipline (12.42.1).

The downfall of the wealthy Statilius Taurus, prosecuted by Tarquitius Priscus at Agrippina's instigation, is given as an example of the atrocities to which Claudius was driven 'Agrippinae artibus' 'through the wiles of Agrippina' (12.59.1). Finally, there is the removal of Domitia Lepida, attributed to feminine jealousy[64] on Agrippina's part, which was effected through false charges. The vehement opposition of Narcissus to Lepida's condemnation provides Tacitus with the opportunity to place in his mouth a spirited attack on Agrippina's stepmotherly activities. Comparing Agrippina with her predecessor Messalina, in terms both of her ambition and her sexual misdemeanours (Pallas is her lover), Narcissus points to the disastrous results to Claudius' house of the treachery of Britannicus' *noverca* (12.65.2). The speech is followed by a melodramatic description of Narcissus embracing Britannicus and stretching out his hands,

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> slave status, the boy laughed at the untimely ministrations of his stepmother, understanding them to be a sham. For they say that he was not slow-witted: either this was true, or else he gained favour through his perils and so retained a reputation for intelligence without it being put to the test.

The last comment on his intelligence puts Agrippina in the wrong either way: if he was not dull-witted, the implication is that Agrippina hid this fact, if he was, the fact was never, because of her, to be put to the test.

[63] 12.41.3. The word *custodia* suggests that, in contrast to his *educatores*, they are guarding him like prison-warders.

[64] 12.64.2 'muliebribus causis' ('for womanly reasons'): the reference is to the jealousy of another woman's influence on her son (jealousy is, of course, not just a womanly but a stepmotherly trait). Martin (1981) 159 notes that Tacitus omits the fact that Nero acted as witness for the prosecution (Suet., *Nero* 7.1) because at this stage he wishes to concentrate on the machinations of Agrippina.

now to heaven, now to the boy, in a prayer that he will soon grow to manhood and avenge himself on his father's enemies and the murderers of his mother (12.65.3).[65]

This touching scene immediately precedes Tacitus' description of the death of Claudius (12.66–9),[66] which he presents as the culmination of a series of schemes on the part of Agrippina designed to establish Nero on the throne. She had, according to Tacitus, long been planning her husband's death; she looked around for a suitable poison (poison, of course, is especially associated with stepmothers in Roman literature). In relation to Britannicus, her hypocrisy is emphasised once again: she is shown holding the boy to her and calling him the true image of his father, as if she needs consolation in her grief, whereas in reality she is merely preventing him from going outside through various tricks until Nero is pronounced emperor. Finally, Tacitus claims that the reason why Claudius' will was not made public was that his choice of Nero, rather than Britannicus, as heir, would arouse the public to a sense of injustice.[67] But there is a different possibility, supported by other sources,[68] namely that Claudius, uncomfortable at the ascendancy attained by his adopted over his natural son, was intending to use Britannicus' thirteenth birthday as an occasion for his son's assumption both of the *toga virilis* and of the position as coheir: in this case, the will would have been suppressed because it named Britannicus, rather than Nero alone. This explanation seems more likely, in which case Tacitus' version of the events may be influenced by a desire to represent Agrippina as plotting her husband's death and her son's succession, in stepmotherly fashion, from the time of her marriage. Rather than have Claudius name Britannicus as his heir along with Nero, or, like Suetonius, have

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[65] Martin (1981) 257 n. 31 sees the scene as a fiction to build up dramatic tension: he regards it as unlikely that Narcissus would take the part of Britannicus when it had been he who had given the orders for Messalina's murder. But as demonstrated by Levick (1990) 75, Narcissus' position at court had been increasingly undermined since the death of Messalina to the advantage of Agrippina's favourite Pallas, so that Narcissus was likely to have supported Britannicus through hostility to Agrippina. On the hostility between Narcissus and Agrippina see also Bauman (1992) 184–6.

[66] On the death of Claudius see chapter 5 n. 44.

[67] 12.69.3 "testamentum tamen haud recitatum, ne antepositus filio privignus iniuria et invidia animos vulgi turbaret" ("the will, however, was not read out, lest the preferring of a stepson to a son should arouse the minds of the people to a sense of injury and resentment").

[68] Suet., *Claud.* 44.1., Dio Cass., 61. 34.1–2; cf. Seif (1973) 292–4, Bauman (1992) 187.

Claudius change his mind about Nero,[69] in which case the murder would have been planned at short notice in response to a crisis,[70] Tacitus depicts a consistent long-term train of events which accords better with the image of the *noverca* constantly plotting and planning in the interests of her own son. Note also the vocabulary employed by Tacitus: Claudius is said to have preferred a *privignus* to a *filius*. Technically Nero, as the adopted son of Claudius, could be described as *filius* ('son') rather than *privignus* ('stepson').[71] Tacitus purposely juxtaposes *filius* and *privignus* in this, the last sentence of the 12th book, in order to throw into relief the theme which had its commencement at the book's beginning—how the principate passed from Claudius into the hands of Nero through the machinations of Agrippina, Britannicus' *saeva noverca*.[72]

C. *Octavia*

In the case of Livia, and also Agrippina, Tacitus makes use of the literary and rhetorical stereotype of the *saeva noverca* in order to portray these women in as negative a light as possible. The opposite happens with Plutarch's presentation of Octavia, sister of Augustus: by exploiting the reader's preconceptions about stepmothers he transforms a woman who raised her stepchildren in her husband's absence into a paragon not only of stepmotherly, but also of womanly, rectitude.

The basic facts of Octavia's life are these. Wedded to Mark Antony to seal the peace of Brundisium in 40 BC, Octavia had previously been the wife of Claudius Marcellus, by whom she had a son, the Marcellus who was to become the first husband of Augustus' daughter Julia, and two daughters. From Antony's earlier marriage to Fulvia,

[69] Given Nero's popularity it is unlikely that Claudius would have disinherited his adopted son: see Levick (1990) 70, 76, arguing that the idea of a joint succession was Claudius' own plan from the beginning to secure the continuation of the dynasty, on the analogy of Augustus' promotion of his grandsons Gaius and Lucius, then of his stepsons Tiberius and Drusus, and finally of Germanicus as Tiberius' adopted son and brother for Tiberius' son Drusus.

[70] Though the *timing* of the act is in response to a crisis (12.64: a remark of Claudius in his cups about punishing wifely misdeeds frightened Agrippina into quick action).

[71] Or perhaps 'filius adoptivus' ('adopted son').

[72] On the prominence of this theme in Book 12, see also Seif (1973) 140–5, Martin (1981) 158–60, commenting that the six year-beginnings in the book all have as

she inherited two stepsons, Antonius Antyllus and Jullus Antonius.[73] There were also the twins Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, born, in the same year, as a result of Antony's first (fleeting) union with Cleopatra, though at the time of Antony's marriage to Octavia they were living with their mother, and Octavia may not even have learned about their existence until after the commencement of Antony's more permanent sojourn with the queen of Egypt. This began in late 37, at which time Octavia, having been instrumental in bringing about the Treaty of Tarentum between Octavian and her husband, was sent back to Rome by Antony, on the excuse that he did not wish her to be involved in the dangers of his coming Parthian campaign (Dio Cass. 48.54.5). Early the next year she bore Antony a second daughter; she continued living in his house (and raising his two sons by Fulvia as well as her own children) despite the fact that he was now enjoying with Cleopatra a union which, though illegal in Roman eyes, may have been sollemnised as a marriage in Egypt. This union resulted in one more stepchild for Octavia, namely Ptolemy Philadelphus. In 35 Octavia was rebuffed by her husband when she travelled to Athens to bring him reinforcements in the form of supplies (clothes, money etc) for his troops and 2,000 soldiers.[74] She did not receive the formal note of divorce (which was tantamount to a declaration of war against Octavian) until 32. When she left Antony's house, she took with her all the children except the elder son of Antony by Fulvia who was with his father at the time. After the battle of Actium the next year, this stepson, Antyllus, was executed by Octavian; the younger, Jullus Antonius, was spared and eventually married his stepsister Marcella when Agrippa divorced her in order to become the second husband of Julia. Consul in 10BC, Jullus later lost his life as a result of his adultery/conspiracy with Julia the Elder. Of Antony's three children by Cleopatra, Selene was

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their first item something about Agrippina and the advancement of Nero or else the impending death of Claudius. Martin also points out that the Book ends, not with Claudius' death or an obituary, but with the establishment of Nero on the throne.

[73] Antony also had a daughter, Antonia, from an earlier marriage to a cousin. She is not mentioned by Plutarch; the fact that in 36 Antony attempted to arrange her marriage with the son of Lepidus (Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.93) might suggest that she was in the custody of her father at that time. Antony's other earlier union to Fadia produced children (Cicero, *Phil.* 2.3, *Att.* 16.11.1); it is uncertain, however, whether this was a marriage proper, and consequently Antony may not have had the children, if they survived, in his care at the time of his marriage to Octavia.

[74] Dio Cass., 49.33.4., Plut., *Ant.* 53. 1–4.

subsequently reared by Octavia till her marriage in 20 BC to Juba king of Mauretania.[75] As a stepmother, then, Octavia had the care of two stepsons of Antony, whom she continued to keep with her even though estranged and finally divorced from her husband;[76] she also reared at least one child of her husband who was illegitimate in Roman law. Of these stepchildren, two flourished: Selene was given in marriage to a king; Jullus Antonius, apart from attaining the rank of consul, was married to Augustus' niece; he was a close candidate for the succession after Agrippa and his sons, and the two sons of Livia. At Octavia's funeral in 11 B.C. he may have been one of the pall bearers.[77]

As an interpretation of this information, Tarn's description of Octavia in the *Cambridge Ancient History* is worth quoting, since although extreme and embellished with outdated sentimentality, it is representative of a view of Octavia commonly adopted by modern[78] historians and based largely on Plutarch's detailed characterisation in his *Life of Antony*:

> Her gentleness and goodness, and her devoted obedience to her husband, sprang from strength, not from weakness; what she saw to be her duty, that, quite simply, she did. She made no complaint of Antony's treatment of her; she helped him as long as he would let her, and when the end came she took charge of his children by the rival who had ousted her and brought them up with her own, the crowning heroism of perhaps the loveliest nature which the ancient world can show.[79]

Bearing in mind the general reluctance on the part of Greek and Roman writers to admit the existence of a good stepmother, this portrayal of Octavia as a model of virtue gives cause for suspicion,

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[75] Dio Cass. 51.15.6; for the fate of the two boys see discussion below.

[76] The elder was with Antony from some time after 35BC till his death in 31BC.

[77] Dio (54.35.5) says that Octavia's body was carried by her sons-in-law. This will refer to the husband of the Younger Antonia, Drusus, who delivered an oration (Dio Cass., loc. cit.) and to either or both of her other sons-in-law, L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, husband of the elder Antonia, and Jullus Antonius who, as husband of Marcella, was a son-in-law as well as a stepson.

[78] E.g. Balsdon (1962) 201 "nothing in the life of Augustus' sister Octavia is more attractive than her concern for her stepchildren, despite the treatment which she received from their father", Scullard (1963) 172 (with reference to her devotion to her husband), E.G. Huzar "Mark Antony: Marriages vs. Careers", *CJ* 81 (1986), 106, Gray-Fow (1988), 745.

[79] Tarn (1934) 51.

especially in view of the fact that she was no ordinary Roman matron but an intermediary in the political game between her husband Antony and her brother Octavian. Given that the latter was able to exploit Antony's treatment of his sister as part of his campaign of propaganda against Antony prior to Actium,[80] it must be asked to what extent Octavia, the paradigm of both wifely devotion and of stepmotherly goodness, is merely a fiction, fostered by her brother for his own political ends, and developed more fully by Plutarch.[81]

Let us look in closer detail at Plutarch's picture of Octavia. In comparison with the other main sources, Dio and Appian, the prominence assigned to Octavia by Plutarch is considerable. Whether or not Plutarch has exaggerated Octavia's rôle in the political events of the thirties is debatable;[82] of greater interest to the present discussion are the aspects of Octavia's character which Plutarch chooses to elaborate. As Pelling has pointed out (cf. n. 81 above), the portrait of Octavia is intended as a foil to that of Cleopatra. For maximum impact, Octavia had to be presented as a worthy rival of Cleopatra for Antony's affections: hence she was portrayed as equally beautiful,

[80] Cf. Dio Cass., 50.26.1–2: in Octavian's speech to his troops prior to Actium, Antony's behaviour towards Octavia is stressed.

[81] Pelling (1988) esp. 202, argues that Plutarch's portrait of Octavia is essentially his own creation, developed as a foil to that of Cleopatra, the former representing the Roman values that Antony relinquished in favour of the Eastern queen. Though Plutarch no doubt elaborated on the known facts and perhaps exaggerated the importance of Octavia's rôle in political events, it probable that he exploited a favourable attitude to Octavia which had become part of the tradition and which goes back to Octavian's propaganda. (Pelling (1979), 90, suggests that Plutarch is likely to have used an oral tradition learned from his Roman friends and acquaintances: perhaps it is this that underlies his remark about Octavia χρῆμα θαυμαστὸν ὡς λέγεται γυναικός 'a wonder of a woman, so it is said'.) Pomeroy (1975) 185 says that Octavia's image may be distorted by propaganda; cf. Dixon (1988) 157. Prof. Hoyos suggests that Plutarch had access to Octavian's *laudatio funebris* ('funeral eulogy') for his sister (mentioned at Dio Cass., 54.34.5). It is uncertain whether the tradition about Octavia contained the stepmother element: it would certainly have been useful for Octavian's propaganda to prompt indignation against Antony by drawing a contrast between his insulting behaviour towards Octavians' sister and the behaviour of Octavia herself, the wronged innocent who not only raised his children by a former wife-her stepsons—even after he had divorced her, but afterwards generously took on board his children by Cleopatra.

[82] It was argued by Syme (1939) 225, 26, that Octavia's mediatory rôle both in the meeting between Octavian and Antony at Tarentum in 37 and the taking of troops to Antony in 35 is exaggerated: for a different view, see M.W. Singer "Octavia's Mediation at Tarentum" *CJ* 43 (1947), 173–77, Bauman (1992) 92, and D.E. Kleiner, "Politics and Gender in the Pictorial Propaganda of Antony and Octavian", *EMC* 36 *n.s.* 11 (1992), 363f. (discussing how Antony's coinage reflects Octavia's political rôle).

and with a strength of character that enabled her to exert an influence in the political sphere (e.g. her rôle in the treaty of Tarentum). Moreover, Octavia symbolises the ideal Roman *matrona* ('married woman') rejected by Antony in favour of the Eastern concubine Cleopatra. On the political front, therefore, she is shown acting as an intermediary between men—the one public rôle traditionally acceptable for a woman—[83] while in her personal life, the emphasis is placed on her position as wife, mother and stepmother.

Octavia's qualities are brought out by Plutarch in several passages. First, the treaty at Tarentum in 37. Though the main sources all agree, on this occasion, that Octavia played a significant part in events, Plutarch (*Ant.* 35.2) includes details not found elsewhere. Octavia was sent at her request to Octavian by Antony, *being pregnant, and already having a second little daughter by him* (ἔγκυον μὲν οὖσαν, ἤδη δὲ καὶ δεύτερον ἐξ αὐτοῦ θυγάτριον ἔχουσαν: note the emotive diminutive θυγάτριον 'little daughter').[84] Though the detail of the pregnancy underlines Octavia's determined resolve,[85] the mention of the second child at this point is gratuitous,[86] and the whole comment looks like an addition by Plutarch designed to emphasise Octavia's maternal rôle as part of his characterisation of her. Dio[87] and Appian confirm Plutarch's statement that after the treaty Octavia was sent back to Rome to Octavian's care. At this point too Plutarch elaborates: whereas Appian merely mentions a single daughter of Octavia and Antony, Plutarch has Antony send Octavia for safekeeping to her brother, together with both his children by her and those from his earlier marriage to Fulvia (35.8). Thus Plutarch exploits the opportunity to stress Octavia's rôle as a good stepmother.

The next incident in which Octavia figures is Antony's rejection,

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[83] Cf. Pomeroy (1975) 185.

[84] The reference to two daughters is apparently a mistake (her second daughter Antonia, born in early 36, was the child with whom she was pregnant), unless, as Pelling (1988), 214, suggests, there was a child in between the two Antonias who presumably died young.

[85] It might also suggest that Antony exploited the sight of the pregnant Octavia as a visible reminder to Octavian of the treaty at Brundisium, which her marriage to Antony was designed to cement.

[86] In Appian (*B.Civ.* 5.95), allusion is made to the daughter Octavia had already born Antony, but this comes in a more appropriate place (Octavia is left in Octavian's care by Antony, together with their child).

[87] 48.54.5, giving as Antony's reason that he wanted her to avoid the dangers of the Parthian campaign: note there is *no* mention of Octavia's pregnancy or her other offspring.

in 35, of her proferred assistance, a rebuff which amounted to a denial of their marriage, even if the formal order of divorce did not come for three years. All three sources mention Octavia's sending of the troops to Antony; Dio (49.33.4) adds that Antony ordered her to return to Rome. Again, it is only Plutarch who elaborates the rôle of Octavia. In particular, the aftermath of Octavia's return to Rome is described at some length. A touching picture is painted of Octavia disobeying instructions from Octavian to leave Antony's house and remaining devoted to her husband despite his insulting treatment of her: "she remained in Antony's house as if he were present in it, and took the noblest and most generous care, not only of his children by her, but of those by Fulvia also. Receiving in her house those friends of Antony who had been sent for offices or business, she helped them to obtain from Octavian whatever they needed. But without meaning to, she did damage to Antony through her actions, for the wrong he did to such a woman made him hated" (Plutarch, *Ant.* 54.3–4). It is impossible to tell how much of this story is Plutarch's own invention: it will be derived in part at least from the propaganda of Octavian. At any rate, Plutarch shows Octavia as the ideal wife and mother largely by emphasising her behaviour as *stepmother*, the best proof of her devotion to her husband and of her maternal qualities being that she is prepared to be a mother not only her own children but also her husband's children by another woman.

In the concluding chapter of his *Life of Antony*, Plutarch describes the fates of Antony's descendants. Of his seven children, only the eldest, Antyllus, the son of Fulvia, was killed by Octavian; the rest were raised by Octavia. Once more laying stress on her virtues as a good stepmother, Plutarch dwells on how Octavia helped two of her stepchildren to enjoy success in life: she provided for Cleopatra Selene a royal marriage to the cultured king Juba, while the younger son of Antony and Fulvia, Jullus, she raised so high that he was favoured by Augustus next after Agrippa and Livia's sons.[88] On the surface, these actions might indeed demonstrate that Octavia was an exemplary stepmother: not only did she raise these stepchildren and look after their interests, but given that they were the offspring of Octavian's defeated enemy,[89] their very survival after Actium might suggest that

[88] *Ant.* 87.2.

[89] As well, each had seen a brother executed as a potential threat to the Princeps, and in the case of Cleopatra Selene, she bore the name of her mother, built up in

Octavia protected them against her brother.[90] There are other factors, however, which need to be taken into account. In the case of Selene, the fact that she was spared was no doubt due not so much to special intercession on the part of Octavia as to Augustus' practice of murdering where necessary but showing *clementia* ('clemency') where it was safe to do so.[91] Cleopatra's daughter enjoyed no special prestige at Rome which might have detracted from that of Octavia's own daughters. Finally, Selene's marriage was diplomatically useful for Augustus: viewed in this light, it need not reflect concern for her stepdaughter's welfare on the part of Octavia (on the contrary, it removed her permanently from Rome). In the case of Jullus, it is significant that Augustus seems to have born no grudges against the sons of his former enemies; many of them prospered: it was important to Augustus to conciliate the nobility and their presence gave his party prestige. Whereas Antyllus may have been killed as a possible threat to Octavian (he was the elder of Antony's sons by Fulvia and was resident with his father when Antony died), to spare the younger son, as with Selene, was a politically useful act of *clementia*, an act that need have had nothing to do with Octavia. In any case, Octavia was in a position where she could afford to be generous towards her stepson, since the normal motivation for stepmotherly malice—jealousy that a stepson interfers with a son's chances of inheritance—was absent. If her son and stepson were in any sense rival candidates for an inheritance, it was for the position of her brother Augustus' heir, and Augustus' choice naturally fell, without the need of prompting from Octavia, on his blood-relation Marcellus, rather than on Mark Antony's son.

All this does not, of course, preclude the possibility that Octavia was a kind stepmother who actively promoted the interests of her stepchildren. The point is that Plutarch seems to be building on the basic facts that Octavia raised two of Antony's children by other women and that they flourished, in order to present her as a para-

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Augustan propaganda as the *fatale monstrum* ('fateful/doom-bringing monstrosity'), the personification of the hostile forces of the East over whom Octavian had triumphed at Actium.

[90] Plutarch may be hinting at this when he says that only Antyllus was killed by Octavian—is there a suggestion that if it had not been for Octavia he might have killed some of the others too? The fact that a stepmother would normally aim to destroy the stepchildren makes one who actively opposed their killing remarkable.

[91] Syme (1939) 299, on Julius Caesar, followed by Augustus, practising the virtue of *clementia* ('clemency') "when murder could serve no useful purpose".

gon: this he is able to do because the stereotype of the murderous stepmother was so deeply entrenched that any stepmother who did not conform to it was by definition a prodigy. One further point. Not only does Plutarch stress Octavia's exceptional treatment of her stepchildren Selene and Jullus, but he conveniently hides facts that might detract from his picture of Octavia as *bona noverca* ('good stepmother'). Thus, he omits mention of Antony's first two unions and their offspring, presumably because these stepchildren were *not* raised by Octavia. Second, although he represents Octavia as bringing up all six children by Antony with the exception of Antyllus, it is not certain that the two sons of Cleopatra, Alexander Helios and Ptolemy, survived: we hear nothing of their later careers (the fact that Plutarch concentrates on Jullus and Selene suggests that there was no information available). Dio (51.15.6–8) confirms that Antony's three children by Cleopatra were spared after their mother's death[92] and says that the twins Alexander Helios and Selene were brought to Rome to walk in Octavian's triumph. It is possible, however, that the boys were quietly done away with after they had ceased to be of use to Octavian.[93]

In assessing the veracity of Plutarch's portrait of Octavia, we are also fortunate to have a passage from Seneca in which a different side of Octavia's character is presented. After the death of her only son Marcellus, Octavia, according to Seneca, bore feelings of hatred towards all other mothers, especially Livia, her hatred for whom amounted to a frenzy because Livia's son, as she thought,. would now inherit the happiness which she had been promised.[94] This picture of a mother consumed with an excess of grief, but also desperately ambitious for her son, offers a salutary corrective to the image of the gentle, uncomplaining and tediously perfect Octavia as depicted in Plutarch.

There may be more to the matter, however. Despite Octavia's fear that Tiberius would become Julia's husband (and presumably Augustus' heir) after the death of Marcellus, it was to Agrippa, husband of Octavia's daughter Marcella, that Julia was married. If

[92] I.e. Cleopatra (Selene), Alexander (Helios) and Ptolemy: Caesarion, reputedly her son by Julius Caesar, was killed.

[93] According to Syme (1939) 300, Helios was 'supressed'. Others accept Plutarch's statement that Octavia raised them: so Tarn (1934) 112, Scullard (1963) 176, Treggiari (1991a) 469.

[94] Sen., *ad Marc.* 2.3–5.

Octavia hated Livia, as Seneca suggests, she would not have been unhappy at the arrangement. It is possible, however, that Octavia was actually responsible for the match. According to Plutarch (*Ant.* 87), Octavia persuaded her brother to marry Julia to Agrippa, after first divorcing Agrippa from his present wife Marcella: what motive would Octavia have had for breaking up her own daughter's marriage, except to thwart the ambitions of her rival Livia? Plutarch's version of the incident might be one further instance of his tendency to exaggerate Octavia's rôle;[95] on the other hand, if it is correct, it shows us a woman who was not merely a passive player in events but who was able to exert influence over her brother in his dynastic arrangements, and who, more importantly, through ambition for her son, became involved in intrigues and rivalries.[96] In other words, a woman who under different circumstances[97] might have been capable of stepmotherly machinations.

To summarise. Plutarch's portrait of Octavia, derived to a greater or lesser extent from the propaganda of her brother Octavian, shows her as the paradigm of Roman womanly virtue, a χρῆμαθαυμαστὸν γυναικός('a wonder of a woman').[98] In contrast to Dio and Appian, for whom Octavia remains a shadowy figure, Plutarch takes every opportunity to lay stress on her matronly qualities. In particular, the depiction of Octavia as ideal wife and mother is achieved by painting her as a good stepmother.[99] That a *bona noverca* could provide so powerful an *exemplum* ('paradigm') of the ideal woman demonstrates the extent to which kindness on the part of a stepmother was regarded as abnormal. And the frequent acceptance of this view of Octavia by 20th century scholars shows that negative attitudes towards stepmothers were not confined to the ancients.

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[95] So Pelling (1988) 325; contra Balsdon (1962) 74, Bauman (1992) 101. According to Suet., *Aug.* 63.1, it was Augustus who prevailed on Octavia to let Marcella divorce Agrippa so that he could marry Julia.

[96] Even if there is some exaggeration, she does seem to have played a rôle in some events: for instance, as noted above (n. 82), it is not just Plutarch who gives Octavia a rôle in the Peace of Tarentum. And the grant of tribunician power and other honours, even if it was used by Octavian for his own purposes, did give her a special position.

[97] I.e. if her stepchild threatened her own children's prospects.

[98] In the words of Plutarch, *Ant.* 31.2.

[99] There was no better way of making a woman an outstanding wife and mother, since being a good stepmother requires both wifely loyalty (i.e. raising a husband's children by another woman for his sake) and motherly devotion (towards the stepchildren).

It is possible, in fact, that Octavia the good stepmother is just as much a fiction as Livia the bad stepmother. In a sense, they were no different—both were typical Roman mothers, politically ambitious for their sons, and in a position to achieve such ambitions. But because Livia was the mother of an unpopular emperor who succeeded to power only after the demise or exile of her 'stepsons', and because she herself attained a position of power unprecedented for a woman,[100] Livia was portrayed as a *saeva noverca*. Octavia, by contrast, raised several stepchildren in the absence of her husband: this fact was exploited by her brother in his propaganda campaign against Antony; moreover, in the case of Jullus, she had no motivation for stepmotherly hostility, since this stepson did not stand in the way of her ambitions for her son Marcellus as Augustus' heir. Finally, the tradition of Octavia as ideal *matrona*, fostered by her brother, was reinforced by the fact that she was the mother of the 'lost heir' Marcellus: hence she attracted sympathy as the eternally bereaved Mother. Ironically, while Livia's attainment of her ambitions led to her reputation as a ruthless *noverca*, Octavia's failure to do so ensured her place in history as the paradigm of a Roman woman.

[100] Purcell (1986), 95f. argues that the hostile tradition to Livia—due to her success in the public realm—accuses her of crimes that deliberately invert her professed virtues as a *matrona* (e.g. the *matrona venefica* ('married woman as poisoner') is an inversion of women's domestic rôle in administering potions as cures).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, it will be useful first to summarise the main points made in the foregoing chapters, emphasising both the similarities and the differences between the Greek and Roman portrayal of the stepmother. The question will also be addressed of why the image of the 'wicked stepmother' is so prevalent in the Roman texts, and an explanation will be sought in the nature of Roman society.

The image of the stepmother has been examined in two main periods: 5th century Athens and Rome in the late Republic and early Empire. Though the stereotype of the *saeva noverca* is especially associated with the Roman declamation and the literature influenced thereby, a consistent picture of the evil stepmother emerges in Greek literary texts as well, in particular, Attic tragedy. This literary portrayal of the stepmother is a reflection of genuine attitudes to stepmothers shared by both cultures: it centres on the basic assumptions that stepmotherly malevolence is an inevitable consequence of a woman taking on the rôle of stepmother, and that disputes in stepfamilies may be solely attributed in every case to the activities of a 'wicked stepmother'. So widespread is this view, that it is even enshrined in law. Mention has already been made of the law of Charondas disfranchising fathers who remarried, and of Plato's theoretical injunction along the same lines.[1] As for Rome, it is interesting that the legal definition of parricide did not include the killing of a stepmother, though almost every other relative, from members of the nuclear and extended family to in-laws, was specified by name, male and female being in most cases listed separately. Especially significant is the inclusion of the other steprelatives—*vitricus*, *privignus* and *privigna*, which makes the failure to mention *novercae* even more striking, and further illustrates the common tendency to vilify the step-

[1] As I pointed out (ch. 1 n. 22), Charondas may have been more concerned about protecting the interests of children rather than attacking stepmothers; nonetheless it is interesting that there are no laws involving the remarriage of widows with children. If stepfathers, like stepmothers, had a reputation for malevolence, a law might be envisaged, for instance, forbidding a husband to select his children's guardian as his widow's new husband (a situation which would give the stepfather opportunities to interfere, as Phormio was alleged to have done: see chapter 3).

mother rather than the other members of the stepfamily.[2]

The literary stereotype of the stepmother takes three main forms: (1) the stepmother as murderess, her motivation being to obtain the inheritance for her own son (2) the stepmother as persecutor of a stepdaughter (3) the 'amorous' stepmother. The first type is the most common in both Greek and Roman texts, while the second type, close to the stepmother of folktale, is confined to Greek literature, where it receives its most extensive treatment in the myth of Sidero and Tyro.[3] In all three manifestations, the stepmother of literature is no mere flight of imagination but is founded on the social reality of stepfamily conflict. The precise relationship between literature and real life is a complicated one. The stepmother stereotype has some factual basis in the position of stepmothers in society; to a greater extent, however, the stepmother is made the scapegoat for stepfamily conflicts in general.

In discussing the relationship between Greek literature, where stepmothers appear as mythological characters, and social reality, I

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[2] Dig. 48.9.1:

> Lege Pompeia de parricidiis cavetur, ut, si quis patrem matrem, avum aviam, fratrem sororem patruelem matruelem, patruum avunculum amitam, consobrinum consobrinam, uxorem virum generum socrum, vitricum, privignum privignam, patronum patronam occiderit cuiusve dolo malo id factum erit, ut poena ea teneatur quae est legis Corneliae de sicariis.

> By the law of Pompey on parricide (i.e. murder of a close relative) it is stipulated that anyone who kills their father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, brother, sister, first cousin on the father's or mother's side, paternal or maternal uncle or paternal aunt, maternal aunt's children of either sex, wife, husband, son-in-law or mother-in-law, stepfather, stepson or stepdaughter, male or female patron, or brings about such a crime with malicious intent, should be liable to the same punishment as that laid down by the Cornelian law on murderers.

Marcianus, who cites this law, comments (§3) on the omission of *novercae* and *sponsae*, giving as his opinion that the spirit of the law includes these as well; the exclusion of stepmothers is nonetheless significant, especially in view of the fact that most of the other relationships, especially the step-relationships, are spelt out in such detail.

[3] And more obliquely, in myths where a daughter is mistreated along with a son: Phrixus and Helle, Tennes and Hemithea. It forms no part of the stereotype of the *saeva noverca* originating in the declamation, though there is some evidence that the stepmother/stepdaughter conflict was portrayed in the native Roman *comoedia togata*: Afranius' *Divortium* contained a malicious stepmother who apparently incited her husband to break up his daughter's marriage, and in Titinius' *Insubra* there was possibly a dispute involving a stepdaughter, though the sex of the step-parent is unclear. For discussion see chapter 4.

focussed on 5th century Athens, since the majority of the stepmother myths, if not originating at that period, enjoyed a special popularity in Attic Tragedy. It seems a reasonable assumption that the stepmother themes treated in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides can be viewed in the light of contemporary Athenian society.

Much analysis of both myths and folktales views the stepmother as a negative mother-figure: e.g. she is a projection of fears and insecurities about the mother as nurturer and disciplinarian, or of unspoken Oedipal desires. In such studies, the hostile portrayal of the stepmother is explained in terms of the stepmother as an encapsulation of negative feelings about the mother. This approach is inadequate, however: apart from the fact that some myths, especially those involving the inheritance issue, are clearly concerned with stepfamily conflict (in other words, the stepmother is a real stepmother and not merely a symbol), it must be stressed that, even if the stepmother's function *is* interpreted as symbolic, the fact that stepmothers were chosen to play such a rôle demonstrates that they were regarded, in real life, in a negative light.[4] In other words, the appearance of the stepmother as villain in the myths still needs to be explained in terms of the background in society.

How, then, was the real world of 5th century Athens reflected in the stepmother stories utilised by the tragedians? In the first place, there is no evidence that the concept of the malevolent stepmother is based directly on fact. Examples of real life paradigms for each of the three types of stepmotherly behaviour portrayed in Greek literature are hard to find. Although an Athenian stepmother in reality had comparatively little motivation for resorting to murder, it is interesting to note that even in situations where a closer parallel[5] to the myths existed—namely the imperial family at Rome, and the Hellenistic kingdoms—murderous stepmothers are rare. In Rome, as we saw, the only example is Agrippina and even in this case it was her son Nero who was responsible for the demise of his stepbrother Britannicus. From the Hellenistic kingdoms, I have discovered only three instances of possible stepmotherly behaviour, and in two of

[4] Contrast stepfathers, who do not have the same reputation as stepmothers and who are not employed in folktales and myths as a symbol for antagonistic feelings towards the father.

[5] I.e. where the inheritance-a throne-could not be shared, and there were consequently good reasons why a stepmother might wish to dispose of a stepson.

these (Laodice and Olympias) it is likely that all we have is rumour[6] rather than fact: (1) the killing of Agathocles, son of the Thracian ruler Lysimachus, by his father, was commonly attributed to the influence of Agathocles' stepmother Arsinoe (later to become Arsinoe 2 of Egypt)[7] (2) Laodice, mother of Seleucus and Antiochus and estranged first wife of Antiochus 2, was rumoured to have poisoned[8] her husband in order to secure the throne for Seleucus and to have also been behind the killing of the second wife Berenice and her son[9] (3) Among other deeds, Olympias (mother of Alexander the Great) was accused of giving drugs to her stepson Arrhidaeus which rendered him mentally deficient. Later she was also implicated in the deaths of both her husband Philip and his last wife Cleopatra and her baby, born not long before Philip's death.[10]

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[6] The view that Olympias' reputation derives from propaganda is argued strongly by Hammond (1988), 10 etc.; cf. John R. Ellis, *Philip 2 and Macedonian Imperialism*, London: (1976) 254 n. 96 (on Arrhidaeus). E. Badian, "The Death of Philip II", *Phoenix* 17 (1963), 244–50, however, accepts that Olympias was responsible for the deaths of Cleopatra and her child. For Laodice see, for example, Édouard Will, Claude Mossé, and Paul Goukowsky, *Le mond grec et l'orient* (4th ed. Paris: 1993 (1975) vol. 2, 375, H. Heinen, "The Syrian-Egyptian Wars and the New Kingdoms of Asia Minor" in *The Cambridge Ancient History* ed. F.W.Walbank, A.E. Astin, et al. (Cambridge: 2nd ed., 1984) vol 7 part 1, 420.

[7] Strab., 13.4.1., Trog., *Prol.* 17., Memnon, *FGrH* 434 F 5.4–5., Paus., 1.10.3–4., Justin, 17.1.1–6, etc. Cf. G. Longega, *Arsinoe 2* (Rome: 1968) 54, Will (1979) 100, S. M. Burstein, "Arsinoe II Philadelphos: A Revisionist View" in *Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage*, ed. W.L. Adams and E.N. Borza (New York: 1982) 200, Hammond (1988) 239 etc.

[8] App., *Syr.* 65, cf. Plin., *Nat.* 7.53.

[9] Justin, 27.1.1–2: "mortuo Syriae rege Antiocho, cum in locum eius filius Seleucus successisset, hortante matre Laodice... Beronicem, novercam suam... cum parvulo fratre ex ea suscepto interfecit" ("on the death of Antiochus king of Syria, when his son Seleucus had succeeded to the throne, at the urging of his mother Laodice he put to death Beronice, his stepmother, together with his little (half-)brother, her son")—an interesting case where a stepson is accused of killing his *noverca* but where, in keeping with the conventional innocence of stepsons, his deed is attributed to the influence of his mother.

[10] See Plutarch, *Alex.* 77.5 (for the story about the drugs); *Alex.* 10.4., Paus., 8.7.7., Justin, 9.7.1–2, 12.

A historical case which is more likely to be true comes from Anglo-Saxon England: in 975 AD King Edgar was succeeded by his elder son Edward, despite attempts on the part of Edgar's second wife Aelfthryth to gain support among the nobility for her own son Aethelred. Three years later, the 16-year-old king Edward was treacherously stabbed in the back by an assassin while visiting the home of his stepmother Aelfthryth at Corfe: his half-brother Aethelred (aged 10) ascended the throne without opposition. The story that the murder was instigated by the stepmother seems more than plausible. (See W.J. Corbett in *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: 1922) vol. 3, 378f.).

Although 'wicked stepmothers' are not attested in Athens, it is plain, however, that stepfamily conflict was a reality. The disputes found in the orators involve for the most part inheritance cases and are thus of particular relevance in providing background to the 'murderous' stepmother myths, but the orations also offer evidence for quarrels of a more general nature, especially between stepmothers and stepdaughters (the factual circumstances behind myths of the Sidero kind). Such everyday troubles, which must have occurred in Athens between all stepfamily members, also underly the stepmother myths, though in a disorted way (see below). In lieu of a large amount of ancient evidence (most of our evidence, coming from the orators, is not concerned with day by day family life), modern research into stepfamilies provides useful insights into the sorts of everyday conflicts that arise as a consequence of psychological factors inherent in the stepfamily situation. Finally, a more specific point: the prominence in the myths, as treated by the Attic tragedians, of stepsons who are νόθοι can be linked to the fact that the legitimacy question was a topical one (cf. especially the Periclean laws which debarred the sons of non-Athenians from citizenship and legitimacy); in several recorded inheritance disputes, the legitimacy issue was a factor.

On the other hand, in these cases, where a rival claimant's legitimacy is called into question in order to deprive them of an inheritance, it is members of the younger generation, rather than stepmothers, who are involved. Other types of family conflict found in the Attic orators also originate with stepsons or half-brothers, and in one case, with a stepfather ([Dem]. 58). The conventional image of the stepmother whereby she is represented as the sole instigator of conflict within the stepfamily is thus seen to result from prejudice.[11] Modern research reinforces this impression by demonstrating how all stepfamily members, not only stepmothers, are subject to feelings of hostility and resentment and thus are liable to be responsible for the quarrels which inevitably arise as a result of the peculiar nature

[11] The same can be said for the Hellenistic kingdoms, where half-brothers, stepsons, sons and fathers as well as mothers all appear as alleged murderers (e.g. Alexander's supposed treatment of his stepmother Cleopatra and her child (Athen., 13.557d-e, Justin, 9.7), the murder of his half-brother by Archelaus (referred to in chapter 3 above), the killing of Thessalonice by her son, the murder of 5 sons by their mother Laodice, wife of Arianthes of Cappadocia (Justin, 37.1), of his son Memphites by Ptolemy 8 and of her husband and son by Cleopatra Thea (Liv., *Epit.* 60., App., *Syr.* 69).

of the reconstituted family.[12] In the area of stepfamily 'incest'—the 'amorous stepmother' situation—prejudice is likewise operative. Though no examples were found in Athens of sexual passion on the part of either stepson or stepmother, it is clear that the possibility of the former was countenanced;[13] again contemporary studies demonstrate that sexual feelings are common in stepfamilies among all members—perhaps least so amongst stepmothers.

Prejudice against the stepmother is evinced in two ways: 1) the distortion of reality, whereby emotions actually experienced by stepmothers are assumed to have been invariably translated into action and 2) the attribution of stepfamily conflict to the stepmother rather than to other stepfamily members, as a result of (i) a tendency to take the side of the younger generation and (ii) gender bias.

1) distortion of reality: The stereotype of the murderous stepmother whose sole concern is the inheritance prospects of her own child bears some relationship to the realities of women's rôle in Athenian society. Given that women could not own and inherit property, a woman depended for her position on that of her son, and might resent a stepson who would share with her own son in the inheritance. As we saw, however, the situation in the myths where a throne is at stake, and where the stepson is the heir, gives the stepmother a much greater motivation for murder. The murderous stepmother is not, then, a direct mirror of a real-life circumstances. It may, however, be thought of as a polarisation of everyday family conflict on a more general level. Recent sociological studies are helpful in explaining how the unfavourable reputation of the stepmother comes into being in terms of the psychology of the stepfamily. The notion of stepmotherly malevolence, for instance, has some basis in psychological truth, e.g. the fact that it is natural for a woman to prefer her own children to her stepchildren. And everyday stepfamily troubles *are* sometimes attributable to the stepmother, though they do not necessarily arise from hatred of the stepchild: a stepmother may

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[12] Note that virtually all the modern studies cited are written by women who are themselves stepmothers: thus they are free from the bias which informs all literary portrayals (they do not, on the other hand, appear biased in the opposite direction—for example, all the studies freely admit that stepmothers may harbour feelings of hostility, jealousy, and so on, and that these feelings may be difficult to deal with).

[13] E.g. the fact that the father always believes the stepmother's false accusation in myths, which he would not do so readily if lust on the part of a stepson was regarded as unlikely. See further chapter 3 n. 80.

unwittingly cause conflict with a stepchild by attempting to compensate for guilt at not loving the stepchild sufficiently or through an inability to cope with feelings of resentment or jealousy. Similarly, in the case of the 'amorous' stepmother, a woman with a stepson close to her own age—a circumstance that would have been common in a society where even a first wife was considerably younger than her husband—might experience feelings of sexual attraction towards her stepson. Prejudice, however, comes into play in the assumption that the emotions just discussed-whether hostile or sexual—are invariably not only felt but also translated into action by stepmothers.

2) The attribution of blame to the stepmother rather than to other stepfamily members due to

(i) *the presumed innocence of the younger generation*
In myths involving inheritance, the fact that the stepchild is portrayed as an innocent victim is on the surface attributable to the circumstances of the story: the inheritance (a father's throne) cannot be shared and the stepson, as the eldest child, is normally not threatened by the son of a second marriage, and thus—in contrast to his stepmother—has no motivation for hostility. On the other hand, the malevolence of the stepmother and the innocence of the stepchild in the myths may reflect in a general way the tendency to blame the stepmother for any sort of conflict within the stepfamily. Modern studies demonstrate the reasons why children may resent a stepmother and show that very often disputes of an everyday nature are in reality the fault of the stepchild, yet the stepmother receives the blame because outsiders are prone to take the side of the younger generation. This observation is also relevant to myths involving stepmother/stepdaughter conflict: evidence from real-life Athens too shows that the resentment may be in actual fact on the side of the stepdaughter.

The 'amorous' stepmother situation is a particularly good illustration of the tendency to regard the stepchild as blameless. Although sexual feelings on the part of a stepson for a stepmother are just as likely as the reverse (the fact that the father in myths of the Phaedra type believes the false accusation shows an acknowledgment of this, and it is confirmed by modern scholarship),[14] there are nonetheless

[14] For a real-life amorous stepson from Sicily (309BC), see Diod. Sic., 20.33.5, 68.3: Archagathus, son of the tyrant Agathocles, committed adultery with his stepmother Alcia. When Lyciscus taunted him with it Archagathus killed him. There is also a story in Justin 10.1 that when Artaxerxes gave his son Darius a share in his

virtually no myths in which feelings of passion are depicted on the part of a stepson rather than a stepmother. And when this scenario *is* envisaged, the outcome is quite different from that of the conventional 'amorous' stepmother tales. This is best seen in the story of Antiochus I of Syria and his love for his stepmother Stratonice. The tale was famous, and we have several accounts, all from the Roman period.[15] The prince Antiochus, it is said, was consumed with a hopeless passion for Stratonice, the young wife of his father Seleucus I, who had already born the king a male child. When he refused to yield to this wrongful passion, preferring to starve himself to death, the royal physician called in to attend on the young man discovered the cause of his malady; he conveyed the information to the king, who readily gave up his wife in order to save his son's life: he announced to the people that he was appointing Antiochus co-regent and sending him, along with Stratonice as his wife, to the command of Upper Asia. The story, as related by Plutarch and Appian, is embroidered with details borrowed from literature: the scene where the young man is dying of a passion which he refuses to admit to the doctor resembles the Tragic dialogue between Phaedra and her nurse; the symptoms supposedly displayed by the young man are those described by Sappho, as Plutarch himself admits. For this reason Erwin Rohde[16] dismissed the story as a romantic invention, based on the fact that Seleucus gave his wife to his son. It is possible, however, that the bare bones of the story, i.e. that Antiochus desired his stepmother, derived from Seleucus himself. If Seleucus desired the arrangement,[17] the story that Antiochus was in love with his stepmother and that Seleucus was magnanimously considering his son's interests might have been devised by the king himself in an attempt to make his action more palatable to his subjects. (Although marriages between stepson and stepmother were not unusual among the members of the Macedonian ruling class, who had no scruples with

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kingdom Darius demanded his father's wife as well (referred to earlier, chapter 3 n. 80).

[15] Plut., *Demetr.* 38., App., *Syr.* 59–61., Lucian, *Syr. D.* 17.–18., cf. *Icar.* 15.

[16] (1914) 55ff.

[17] He had never formally divorced Antiochus' mother, and now that Stratonice had performed the wifely function of bearing him a son, he may have preferred to spend his later years with his first wife, closer in age to himself, and hand over the young Stratonice, along with a portion of his kingdom, to the care of his son. It is of course possible that Antiochus really was in love with his stepmother and that Seleucus acquiesced because it suited his own purposes.

regard to incestuous unions where dynastic considerations were uppermost,[18] in other cases the marriages took place after the death of the husband:[19] here, by contrast, the father yielded place to the son during his own lifetime, a circumstance guaranteed to arouse shock and disapproval).

Whatever the facts of the case—and the truth is irretrievable, apart from the basic fact that Seleucus gave his wife to his son—what is significant is the manner in which Antiochus' story is presented by all the sources. Whether the story has a basis in truth or whether it is an invention, the important point is that here we are presented with a stepson who desires his stepmother, and that unlike 'amorous stepmothers' in myth, he is portrayed in a most favourable light: he is a helpless victim of passion who maintains his innocence, preferring to die rather than betray his father; only reluctantly is he persuaded by the king to accept his stepmother as wife. Likewise, Seleucus is regarded as acting in the best interests of his son. Even if Seleucus has to invoke his royal prerogative in order to make the unusual (if not incestuous) union acceptable to all concerned, his subjects' reaction, in every version of the story, is to praise the king for his kind concern for his son's welfare rather than to express horror at the nature of the erotic passion involved. In short, no disapprobation at all is attached to the behaviour of either Antiochus or Seleucus in the matter. If the story was a romantic invention to explain Seleucus' action in handing over his wife, it is significant that Antiochus, rather than Stratonice, was represented as the one who fell in love: a stepson in such a situation is able to win sympathy, whereas passion on the part of a stepmother is believed invariably to have disastrous consequences. Conversely, if the story originated with Seleucus himself, as I suggested above, we can say that it would have been in

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[18] Ghiron-Bistagne (1982), 44f. argues that a relationship between stepmother and stepson was regarded as incestuous by this stage and that Seleucus had to invoke his kingly prerogative to persuade not only the people but the couple themselves to accept the marriage.

[19] Cleopatra 1 and Cleopatra Berenice have already been mentioned (chapter 3 above). There was also Eurydice, mother of Philip 2, who was married to Ptolemaeus, possibly the illegitimate son of her late husband Amyntas, and thus her stepson. The four marriages of Cleopatra 5 (Selene) included unions with Antiochus Cyzicenus (brother of her second husband) and his son Antiochus Eusebes. In two of these cases the stepson was guardian of the stepmother's own child: Macurdy (1932) 21f., suggests that such marriages might have been a custom in the Macedonian royal house.

Seleucus' interests that the people regard the marriage as a sign of a father's devotion to his son, rather than the displacing of one husband with another due to the machinations of a wicked stepmother.

On the same topic, let us return briefly to a case mentioned previously, from imperial Rome (*Digest* 48.9.5), in which the emperor Hadrian exiled a father for killing his son (who was having an affair with his stepmother) on the grounds that the father had abused his *patria potestas* ('father's authority'). The severity of the emperor's condemnation of the father (he is reported to have said that the man behaved more like a *latro* ('bandit') than a father, and that *patria potestas* ought to consist of *pietas* not *atrocitas* ('savagery'), might be founded on the fact that the father killed his son during a hunt, instead of offering him the opportunity to defend himself before a family tribunal, as was customary in such cases. It is, however, also possible to interpret Hadrian's action as implying that because the woman in the affair was a *stepmother*, the young man should have been treated with leniency, even though guilty of a crime: he could be regarded as an unsuspecting youth who was seduced by the wiles of an amorous *noverca*.

(ii) *gender bias*

The treatment of the 'amorous' stepmother displays not only a bias in favour of the younger generation, but also a misogynistic prejudice against the stepmother arising from Greek male attitudes to the sexuality of women. Whether stories of this type are interpreted as a projection of Oedipal fantasies or as a reflection of genuinely-held fears about the outcome of a second marriage where the wife is close in age to the stepson, the important point is that the stepmother is invariably perceived to be at fault because of a belief that female sexuality is potentially destructive owing to women's inability to exercise self-control.

Gender bias is also a factor in the lack of 'wicked stepfather' stories. Modern studies show that stepfathers are just as prone to emotions such jealousy and resentment as are stepmothers. In the area of physical violence, even murder, cases are frequently reported today involving stepfathers, but I do not know of any involving stepmothers. In Athens, the failure of stepfathers to acquire a bad reputation can be explained to some extent in terms of social realities. Since fathers had custody after a divorce, and widows who remar-

ried did not necessarily take their children to their new household, there would not have been as many stepfathers raising stepchildren, and those who did would not have had such close daily contact with them. As regards inheritance, an Athenian stepfather was not in the same position of helplessness which may have bred stepmotherly resentment. In contrast to the stepmother, who saw another woman's son share the inheritance with her own, a stepfather's own children were his heirs: a stepson could not threaten the inheritance prospects of a son, and though he might in theory inherit if the man had no son of his own, this would only happen if the man chose to adopt the stepson. The allegations against Phormio (referred to in the 3rd chapter), however, demonstrate one way in which stepfathers *could* have acquired a reputation for plotting against their stepchildren: here, a man is bequeathed his wards' mother in marriage, thus becoming their stepfather; as guardian he was in a position to embezzle his stepchildren's property.[20] Despite this possibility, however, there is no hint of a general prejudice against stepfathers in any of our sources.

In comparing stepfathers with stepmothers, bias is seen most clearly in the sexual arena. Though amorous stepfathers are never envisaged in literature, in reality sexual attraction between stepfather and stepdaughter is a more likely scenario than between stepmother and stepson. Again, this is demonstrated by contemporary studies; in particular, in cases of sexual abuse, the offender is often a stepfather; rarely, if ever, a stepmother.

Much of what has been said about Athens applies to Rome as well. The stereotype of the *saeva noverca* in Roman literature differs from the Greek portrayal of stepmothers in concentrating on the stepmother as a poisoner whose motivation is to obtain the inheritance in favour of her own child, and in its emphasis on the *noverca* as a character type rather than an individual. The reason lies in the influence on Roman literature of the declamation, especially the *controversia,* which deals in nameless stereotypes and with cases which, even if they do

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[20] The case of Polyeuctus ([Dem.], 58), discussed in chapter 3, is unusual, in that the stepson has been adopted as heir by his mother's father, thus giving the stepfather a motive for removing the stepson, since removal of the heir would put the estate in the possession of the mother/stepfather's wife, and thus into his control as her *kurios* (guardian).

not correspond to the letter of the law, at least purport to be disputes in court (hence the absence of stepmothers of the Sidero type: where daughters are mentioned, it is in the context of murder/inheritance). The Roman tendency to regard stepmothers as members of a class, the *saeva noverca*, informs the portrayal of characters whose stepmotherly qualities were not brought out in the Greek texts: the most notable example is Juno, who is not alluded to as 'stepmother' before the time of Plato and whose rôle as the stepmother *par excellence* in her relationship with Hercules seems to be a Roman innovation. Phaedra, too, also becomes also a paradigm of the *saeva noverca*.[21] So pervasive is the stereotype that it even effects the way in which historical personalities are depicted (cf. the discussion of Livia, Agrippina and Octavia in chapter 6).[22]

In Roman literature, as in Greek, the stereotype of the stepmother is a reflection of genuine fears about the consequences of remarriage, the stepmother receiving the blame for stepfamily conflict. Again, the perception of the stepmother is imbued both with bias in favour of the younger generation and with misogyny. In determining the relationship between literature and reality, we are better served for Rome than for Athens; in particular, insight into real-life stepfamilies is offered by legal texts and by the wealth of funerary inscriptions which allows the scope of the investigation to be extended to all ranks of society. Much evidence is available, both epigraphical and literary, to support the contention that the absence of hostility on the part of the younger generation in literary fiction results from prejudice against the stepmother. There is also evidence for good *novercae*. This of course comes as no surprise, but what is interesting is the way such women are treated—Seneca's qualificatory remark that "even a good stepmother costs dear"[23] is typical; in the case of Octavia, her generosity towards her stepchildren is so contrary to expectation that it can be used to turn her into a female paragon.

On the subject of gender bias, while this is no doubt operative, it does not provide the sole explanation for the reputation of stepmothers

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[21] Note that in the Roman period she is connected with love potions (cf. discussion ch. 1), which links her more closely to the *noverca venefica*.

[22] From the Hellenistic period, it is interesting to note, in the case of Arsinoe and Lysimachus' son Agathocles, that although all the sources portray her as acting in a stepmotherly fashion behind the scenes, only the Roman ones, Trogus and Justin (cf. above n. 7) refer to her specifically as a stepmother.

[23] Cited in chapter 1 n. 29.

as compared, for instance, with stepfathers. The inscriptions are interesting in showing that conflict was apparently more common when the step-parent was female. In a legal context, stepmothers had greater reason to resent a stepchild than stepfathers, since men were more often the owners of property and the makers of wills in which the woman's child competed for the inheritance with the stepchild. On the other hand, there were cases like that of Apuleius, married to a wealthy widow, in which a stepfather had the same reason as a stepmother to attack his stepchildren. Yet Apuleius was able to defend himself successfully against the charge of influencing his wife by magical means against her children (one cannot imagine a stepmother under such circumstances winning her case!) and the notion that a husband who disinherits his children in favour of a new wife is the helpless victim of a *noverca*, whereas a mother who acts in the same way is to be reprimanded,[24] displays a jaundiced view of female sexuality.

Differences between Athens and Rome

Although the stereotype of the stepmother who murders her stepson in order to gain the inheritance for her own son is found in Greek literature, it is in the Roman period that the *saeva noverca* assumes special prominence. An attempt must be made to explain why the Romans in particular were so obsessed with the stepmother figure. I would like to offer some suggestions.

1) The notion of the *saeva noverca* as a general stereotype is related to its origins in the declamation, which deals in such stock characters. Also relevant here is the peculiarly Roman tendency to present characters from history and mythology as paradigms of virtues and vices—historians such as Livy and Tacitus are a notable example, and it is in Tacitus, of course, that Livia is characterised along these lines as a classic murderous stepmother.

2) It is possible that, among the Roman aristocracy at least, stepmothers were more prominent in real life than at Athens, due to the common practice of divorce and remarriage for political reasons. And although Augustus' marriage legislation was not a conspicuous success in attaining its objects, its encouragement of remarriage, especially among the wealthier classes, must have had some sort of impact on the number of stepmothers actively raising stepchildren.

[24] Cf. Val. Max., 7.7.4, discussed above in chapter 5.

3) The ability of Roman women to own and inherit property, in contrast to their Athenian counterparts, together with the rules relating to wills and inheritance, which allowed for greater flexibility at Rome than in Athens, meant that a Roman stepmother who resented her stepchild's position as his father's heir had greater opportunities to do something about it.

An Athenian stepmother was powerless to prevent her stepson inheriting short of actually murdering him. Disinherison was not regularly practised, and all sons inherited equally. In addition, stepmotherly wiles would only be effective where a stepmother had a son of her own from the current marriage, since there was little chance that a child of hers from a previous marriage could come into the inheritance of her husband, regardless of the presence of a stepson (in lieu of a son, heirs were customarily adopted from within the family). Finally, since women could not inherit from their husbands, a stepmother had no motivation for removing a stepson in her own favour.

A Roman woman, by contrast, had many more opportunities to deprive a stepson of his rightful inheritance. If she was prepared to resort to the extreme solution of murder, she could in theory obtain the inheritance not only for a son of her own from her present marriage, but also for a son of a previous marriage, since the Romans adopted more freely than the Athenians outside the family. Since, in contrast to Athens, daughters could inherit, the number of opportunities was enlarged: in Pliny's *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the unduteous will'), referred to below, the stepchild who is disinherited is a daughter; it would also be possible for a stepmother to get the inheritance away from a stepson in favour of a daughter of her own.[25] She could also, if childless, obtain the inheritance on her own behalf, though as we saw, under the Augustan marriage laws a childless wife was in most circumstances only entitled to a 1/10 of the estate.

A Roman stepmother also had opportunities to obtain a share of the inheritance for a son of her own or for herself at the expense of a stepson without resorting to murder. A son could be disinherited by will, and though the *querela inofficiosi testamenti* ('plaint of the

[25] Though this would only apply if the stepson were completely disinherited or removed—given that sons tended to be left a greater share of the estate than daughters, a stepmother could not hope to get her husband to leave more to her daughter than to her stepson.

unduteous will') was available to act as a deterrent, cases such as the famous one described by Pliny (discussed in chapter 5) show that stepmothers tried to influence their husbands in this way. More important is the fact that, whereas in Athens all the estate was shared equally between legitimate sons, in Rome a father was free to make a will in which sons were given unequal shares, a wife was named as a coheir, or a wife and/or stepson was named as a legatee. Clearly, there were opportunities for a stepmother to encroach upon a stepson's inheritance without resorting to illegal means. Moreover, since children could inherit by will from their mothers (in contrast to Athens, where women, not owning property, could not make wills, although their dowry went to their children), this provided stepmothers with a further occasion to influence their husbands against their stepchildren: since the stepchildren's father was still alive, they were in his *potestas* ('legal authority') and he had control over their maternal inheritance.

Whether or not stepmothers in Rome availed themselves of these opportunities in fact is irrelevant: the fear that they might do so was enough to give rise to the stereotype.

4) Roman women of the upper classes, with their ability to own and inherit property and to make wills, simply wielded greater power than their Athenian counterparts. In particular, influential Roman mothers were ambitious on behalf of their sons.[26] Since the stereotypic stepmother acts on behalf of her own child, she is a mother as well as a stepmother. The stronger her ambitions for her own child, the stronger her antagonism towards her stepchild. It follows that in a society like Rome, where mothers were more influential and thus potentially more threatening to men, stepmothers, representing as they do the negative side of the mother, were correspondingly more awesome.

Despite the greater popularity of the stepmother as a stereotype figure in Rome, it must be stressed, in conclusion, that stepmothers receive a bad press in both Greece and Rome. I have dwelt in this chapter on the way in which common preconceptions based on social reality are given expression in the literary stereotype. It goes without saying that the reverse was also true: literature could in-

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[26] *Cf.* Dixon (1988) ch.7 on the importance of imperial ladies as mother figures; also also R.G. Lewis, "Some mothers...", *Athenaeum* 66 (1988), 198–200.

fluence reality, the one reinforcing the other. Plato could use the proverbial malignancy of stepmothers as an argument against the remarriage of a widower; by contrast, at a later period Jerome, presenting the Christian feeling that widows should not remarry, invoked the stereotype of the stepmother as a reason against remarriage for women: so pervasive was the stereotype in various literary genres, that women who became stepmothers were in real life affected adversely by it, just as they still are today.

Summary

Because of gender bias and a tendency to take the side of the younger generation, stepmothers in Athens and Rome were made scapegoats for feelings of antagonism aroused in stepfamily members as a result of remarriage. The prejudiced view of the stepmother as invariably malignant finds its manifestation in Greek and Roman literature as a stock character displaying a consistent pattern of behaviour. Since the character traits associated with the stepmother correspond in large measure to those regarded by the ancients as quintessentially feminine (for instance, jealousy, lack of self-control, and treacherousness), the stepmother was an especially powerful paradigm of the negative side of women, just as the wife/mother represented the ideal. The wicked stepmother of Greek and Roman tradition is an outstanding example of the translation of misogynistic attitudes into a stereotype, the best possible illustration of the dictum "dux malorum femina" ("woman is the chief source of ills").[27]

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[27] Sen., *Phaed.* 559. The words are spoken by Hippolytus who is of course biased, but such sentiments were not confined to women-haters.

APPENDIX ONE

THE STEPMOTHER MYTHS

A. *The Murderous Stepmother*

1. *Ino* (Euripides, *Phrixus I and II*, *TGF*[2] F 819–838, *POxy* XXVII no. 2455 fr. 14 col xvi, fr. 17 col. xix, *POxy* LII no 3652[1]., Apollod., 1.9.1–2; cf. Ov., *Fast.* 3.853 with Bömer ad loc., Tzetz. Lyc., 22 etc.; K. Schauenburg, "Phrixos", *RhM* 101 (1958), 41–50, *LIMC* II.1 950f. s.v. Athamas.)

Jealous of the children of Nephele, Athamas' first wife, Ino invents a cunning plot to get rid of them. She induces the women to roast the wheat-seeds, thus causing a failure of the crops. Next, she bribes the messenger sent by Athamas to consult the Delphic Oracle to bring back a false response demanding the sacrifice of the king's first-born son Phrixus. At the altar Phrixus, along with his sister Helle, is saved from this fate by the intervention of his mother Nephele, who sends a golden ram to transport them across the sea.[2] Helle falls off on the way and is drowned, giving her name to the Hellespont; Phrixus, on arriving at Colchis, sacrifices the ram and gives the fleece to Aeetes, whose daughter he marries, thus providing, in the form of the Golden Fleece, the starting-point for the Argonautic legend. Ino eventually meets her fate when Athamas is driven mad by Hera (in revenge for their nursing of the infant Dionysus); he kills their first child, Learchus; Ino jumps into the sea with the second child, Melicertes, in her arms and is transformed into the sea goddess Leucothoe.

Main variants

Nephele concubine rather than wife: Eur., *TGF*[2] F 824 (attributed to *Phrixus*); Nonn., *Dion.* 10.117.

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[1] Both plays dealt with the machinations of Ino: see especially *POxy* LII (1984) no 3652 with the comments of H.M. Cockle (the papyrus gives the hypothesis to Phrixus I and mentions Ino's plot, thus disproving Webster's suggestion (1967), 131, that the *Phrixus* I dealt with a different subject). See also Turner (1958), 12–15. Sophocles wrote two Athamas plays and a Phrixus, but little is known of their contents. The Ino story may have been treated.

[2] Originally the ram swam, later it was thought of as flying: see D.S. Robertson, "The Flight of Phrixus", *CR* 54 (1940) 1–8.

Nephele second wife, Ino first (divorced by Athamas in favour of Nephele): Eur., *Phrixus* II (?)[3], Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 7.86, Tzetz. Lyc., 22.

Themisto first wife, Ino second: Herodorus, *FGrH* 31 F 38 omits Nephele and has Themisto as mother of Phrixus and Helle.

Phrixus plotted against by Athamas together with Ino: Hdt., 7.197.

Ino's guilt is revealed by a servant while Phrixus stands at the altar: she is saved by Dionysus whom she had nursed; he also drives Phrixus and Helle mad; it is while they are wandering in the forest about to be attacked by Maenads that Nephele comes to them with the ram on which they make their escape: Eur., *Phrixus* II., Hyg., *Fab.* 3., Lact. Plac. ad Stat., *Theb.* 2.281.

Suicide of Ino (originally a separate myth: cf. Hom., *Od.* 5.353ff.) linked to the plot against Phrixus and Helle: Nonn., *Dion.* 10.96ff. (Athamas' madness and Ino's suicide attributed by Ino to Nephele as an act of revenge for plot against her children); Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 7.86 (Athamas kills Learchus on learning of Ino's plot and she escapes punishment by jumping into the sea with Melicertes).

2. *Themisto* (Euripides, *Ino*, *TGF*^{2} F 398–427: plot summarised by Hyg., *Fab.* 4; cf. Athen., 13.560D., Opp., *Cyn.* 3.248., Nonn., *Dion.* 9.320f.; Webster (1967) 98–101.)

Ino being absent, presumed dead, Athamas takes another wife, Themisto, by whom he has twin sons. On discovering Ino to be still alive (she has gone off to Parnassus to take part in Bacchanalian rites), Athamas has her brought back secretly. Themisto, learning of Ino's return but ignorant of her whereabouts, now plans to kill the children of Ino, ironically employing as her accomplice a captive servant who is none other than Ino herself in disguise. To prepare the way for the murder, this 'servant' is instructed to cover Themisto's children with white garments and Ino's with black; when Ino, realising Themisto's intentions, switches the colours, the latter murders her own children, and on discovering her mistake, commits suicide.

[3] This depends on the reading προσεγέννησεν at *POxy* XXVII no. 2455 fr. 17 col xix line 272: cf. Turner (1958), repeated in his commentary in *POxy* XXVII. This would change the motivation of Ino from stepmotherly hatred to the fury of a woman scorned. For the alternative reading προγεγεννηκώς, which would make Ino the 2nd wife, see W. Luppe, "Die Hypothesis zum 'Phrixos Deuteros' des Euripides", *Archiv. f. Pap.* 30 (1984) 31–37.

Main variants
Themisto second wife, Ino third: Hyg., *Fab.* 1 (her motivation is anger that she has been supplanted by a new wife rather than straightforward stepmotherly malevolence).

Themisto married after Ino's suicide—no plot against Ino's children: Apollod., 1.9.2.

3. *Medea* (Sophocles, *Aegeus*, *TrGF* IV F 19–25a., Euripides, *Aegeus*, *TGF*² F 1–13., Apollod., 3.15.6–7, 3.16.1., *Epit.* 1.5–6., Ov., *Met* 7.406., Plut., *Thes.* 12., Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 11.741.; Webster (1967) 77–80, *LIMC* I.1 359 s.v. Aigeus.)
The story in question relates to the stage in Medea's life when she is married to Aegeus, king of Athens. Years earlier, Aegeus had consulted an oracle about his childlessness; on his return home via Troezen he slept with Aethra, daughter of his host Pittheus (to reconcile the story that Poseidon was Theseus' father, it is said that Poseidon happened to sleep with Aethra on the same night). On leaving, Aegeus placed a sword and sandals under a rock with instructions that if Aethra bore a male child, as soon as he was able to roll aside the rock and retrieve these tokens, he should be sent to Aegeus. All this has come to pass, but when the son (Theseus) arrives in disguise in Athens to claim his inheritance, he is recognised immediately by Medea, who reacts in customary stepmotherly style. She persuades her husband that the newcomer is dangerous and urges that he be sent against the Marathonian bull. When this plan fails, she persuades Aegeus to poison the stranger, a scheme that is thwarted in the nick of time when Theseus presents Aegeus with the sword at the very moment that he has been given the posioned cup; Aegeus, realising Theseus' identity, dashes the cup from the hand of his new-found son. Her plot discovered, Medea is forced to take flight.

Main variants
Theseus attacks Medea: Soph., *Aegeus*(?)[4]

[4] Sourvinou-Inwood (1979) 56, argued, from the evidence of vases, that Theseus attacked Medea and that this attack formed the climax of Sophocles' *Aegeus*, murder being averted by a *deus ex machina* at the end of the play.

4. *Penelope* (Parthenius, *Amat.Narr.* 3.)
Odysseus has a love affair with Euippe, by whom he fathers a son, Euryalus. When the child grows to manhood, he is sent by his mother to Odysseus with tokens of his identity. Odysseus being away at the time, Penelope discovers the truth and plots to kill the young man. She convinces Odysseus, on his return, that the stranger is plotting against him; the father murders his own son.

Main variant
Penelope induces her son Telemachus to kill Euryalus: Soph., *Euryalus*, *TrGF* IV F 205.[5]

5. *Hippodamia* (Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 157; cf. Schol. Pind., *Ol.* 1.89., Schol. Eur., *Or.* 4.)
Jealous of the special favour shown by Pelops to his first-born (illegitimate) son, Chrysippus, and fearful that he might be made heir, the Pelopidae, aided and abetted by their mother Hippodamia (Chrysippus' stepmother), plot to kill their half-brother, choosing the two eldest, Atreus and Thyestes, to perform the deed. The murderers go into exile. Hellanicus does not mention Hippodamia's fate, but elsewhere it is said that after Pelops learnt of her rôle in the murder, she either went into exile (Paus., 6.20.7., Dositheus, *FGrH* 54 F 1) or committed suicide (Hyg., *Fab.* 85, 243.3).

Main Variants
Hippodamia given a greater share of the blame: Dositheus (loc. cit.) says that Hippodamia killed Chrysippus herself after an unsuccessful attempt to persuade her sons to perform the deed. According to Hyg., *Fab.* 85, Atreus and Thyestes acted 'impulsu matris Hippodamiae' ('at the instigation of their mother Hippodamia').

Hippodamia's rôle not mentioned: Thuc., 1.9 (Pelops did it and Atreus fled through fear of the same fate), Eust. Hom., *Iliad* 290,16.

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[5] Sutton (1984) 46, suggests that the difference is unimportant: perhaps Odysseus, in Sophocles' version, was behind the plot to kill Euryalus, the actual deed being performed by Telemachus.

6. *Creusa* (Euripides, *Ion*; Sophocles, *Creusa* (?)[6], Conacher (1967) 267–85.)
The plot of Euripides' Tragicomedy *Ion* centres on the stepmotherly machinations of Creusa against her supposed stepson. Though Creusa is in reality the mother of Ion, she does not discover the truth about their relationship until near the end of the play. During the course of the drama, her actions, prompted by the belief that the boy is her husband's bastard son, are depicted, from the viewpoint of Ion at least, as a fine example of stepmotherly behaviour. Creusa is married to Xuthus, having many years previously had a son (Ion) by the god Apollo; the mother and child were abandoned by the god, but unknown to Creusa Apollo ensured that the child was saved and brought up in the sanctuary at Delphi where he is now in the service of Apollo. Xuthus and Creusa, being childless, consult the Delphic Oracle: Apollo plans to restore Ion to Creusa without risking her reputation, by informing Xuthus that Ion is his son. The king accepts the boy; credence is made easier when he recalls a youthful misdemeanour with a Delphian girl prior to his marriage. When the chorus report to Creusa that Xuthus is about to bring home Ion as his lost son and heir, a servant conjectures that Xuthus, after his wife's failure to produce an heir, must have begotten a son from a slave and had him raised secretly at Delphi. Creusa's reaction is to initiate a plot against the boy's life. She prevails on the servant to offer Ion a poisoned cup at a banquet; the plot fails when the wine is poured away because of an ill-omened remark and as he is refilling the glasses Ion notices the death-throes of a dove that has drunk the spilt liquid. When Creusa's part in the affair is revealed, she is sentenced to death for attempted murder and Ion tries to carry out the sentence himself. A happy denoument is brought about by the recognition of Ion's identity and confirmation of the truth by Athena in the rôle of *dea ex machina.*

7. *Hermione* (Euripides, *Andromache.*)
A second instance in which Euripides introduces the element of stepmotherly malevolence into a mythical scenario which does not involve a stepmother proper is his characterisation of Hermione in the *Andromache*. In this play Hermione is in a similar position to that

[6] *TrGF* IV F 350–9: see Appendix 2 note 49.

in which Creusa finds herself: her husband (Neoptolemus) has a son by a concubine (Andromache) whom she fears he will make his heir, since her own union to her husband has failed to produce a child. For this reason she plots against the child. Unlike Creusa, however, Hermione has to share her house with the mother of the child as well: for this reason she is not regarded as the child's stepmother, since it is being raised by its own mother. And her hatred is directed not merely against an unwanted νόθος of her husband but also against his concubine. Since Andromache is present, the main emphasis is on the conflict between the two women, rather than on the plots of Hermione against the child, though these obviously concern Andromache as much as the danger to herself. Nevertheless Hermione's cruelty against Andromache and the child may be regarded as stepmotherly in motivation and intensity.[7]

8. *Sidero* (Sophocles, *Tyro* A, *TrGF* IV F 648–669a,[8] *AP* 3.9 ; cf. Diod. Sic., 4.68., Tzetz. Lyc., 175.)
Tyro, daughter of Salmoneus, gives birth to illegitimate twins; her father, enraged at this disgrace, orders the babies to be exposed and their mother to be kept in prison where, apparently with Salmoneus' conniving, she is tormented by his second wife Sidero. The unfortunate Tyro is eventually rescued by her sons Neleus and Pelias (who, after being suckled by animals, had been found and reared by a peasant): they avenge their mother's wrongs by killing her tormentor

[7] The above summary is based on a straight-forward reading of the play, in particular the conflict between Andromache and Hermione which occupies the first section. The interpretation of Hermione's character is by no means so clear cut, however, since (1) the action falls into three sections, of which the third has little to do with the first two, and in the second, where the stage is dominated not by Andromache but by Hermione, the latter's rôle changes from persecutor to woman in need of rescue (2) even in the first section, Hermione is not necessarily presented in a wholly negative light: some view her as a tragic character unable to cope with the situation because of her immaturity. Scholars who regard Hermione as a villain include Kitto (1961) 228, H. Erbse, "Euripides' 'Andromache'", *Hermes* 94 (1966), 276–97, Conacher (1967) 177, Stevens (1971), 5, 9, H. Golder, "The Mute Andromache", *TAPhA* 113 (1983) 126n. 13. For a more sympathetic view, see for example Burnett (1971), 133ff., 138f., K. H. Lee, "Euripides' Andromache: Observations on Form and Meaning", *Antichthon* 9 (1975), 11, Vellacott (1975), 118f., Humphreys (1983), 63f.

[8] We know there were two *Tyro* plays but it is unclear whether the second (*Tyro* B) was a revised edition of the first, or whether the two plays dealt with different parts of the story: Sutton (1984) 152ff, Pearson (1917), Radt, *TrGF* IV F 463f.

as she clings in terror to the altar of Hera. After the revelation of the boys' identity, including the paternity of Poseidon, Tyro is exculpated and betrothed to Salmoneus' brother Cretheus.

Main variants

Twins born after death of Salmoneus, when Tyro is being brought up by uncle Cretheus: Apollod., 1.9.7ff.; cf. Tzetz. Lyc., 175.

Tyro's persecution by Sidero takes place before the destruction of Salmoneus and the birth of the twins: Diod. Sic., 4.68.

No stepmother; Tyro has illegitimate twins as wife of Cretheus: Hom., *Od* 11.235.

9. *Antiope* (Euripides, *Antiope*, *TGF*[2] F 179–227: plot summarised by Hyg., *Fab.* 8., Apollod., 3.5.5.; Jouan (1966) 375–7, Webster (1967) 205–11, J. Kambitsis, *L'Antiope d'Euripide* (Athens: 1972), *LIMC* I.1 719 s.v. Amphion.)

Like Tyro, Antiope is imprisoned for the disgraceful crime of bearing illegitimate children after being raped by Zeus. The punishment is administered by her uncle on her father's behalf, her father having committed suicide in despair after she ran away when pregnant and married Epopeus (called Epaphus by Hyginus). Dying, her father urged his brother Lycus to take revenge. Lycus obeyed, killed Epopeus and took Antiope prisoner, exposing her sons when they were born. Antiope escapes from Lycus' wife Dirce,[9] to whom she has been handed over for torture, and is reunited with her sons Zetus and Amphion (who have, of course, been raised by a shepherd!); the sons punish Dirce by tying her to a bull, while Lycus, saved by Mercury as he too is about to be killed, is ordered to hand over his kingdom to Amphion.[10]

Main variants

Antiope is former wife of Lycus: Prop., 3.15.11–42., Hyg., *Fab.* 7., Myth. Vat., I 97, II.74 (the motivation for Dirce's behaviour is in this version sexual jealousy: she imprisons Antiope, who has become pregnant by Zeus after being divorced by Lycus for adultery with

[9] For Dirce in this version as equivalent to a wicked stepmother, cf. Delcourt (1959) 64.

[10] In Apollodorus, Lycus is killed.

Epaphus, because she suspects she has been having an affair with Lycus).

10. *Phronime* (Herodotus, 4.154–5.)
Phronime, daughter of Etearchus of Crete, is mistreated and plotted against by her father's (unnamed) second wife, a stepmother in deed as well as name. Eventually the stepmother makes a false accusation against her stepdaughter of immoral conduct: the accusation is believed by Phronime's father; he attempts to dispose of his daughter by befriending a Theran merchant, Themison, who is then persuaded to take an oath to carry out any task demanded of him by the king. On being ordered to take Phronime away and throw her into the sea, the Theran, in anger at being thus tricked, fulfils his obligation by lowering the girl overboard on a rope and pulling her back up. He takes her home to Thera, where she becomes the concubine of Polymnestus; their son is Battus, the future founder of Cyrene.

11. *Endeis* (Pausanias, 2.29.9–10.)
In an athletic contest, Phocus, illegitimate son of Aeacus by the sea nymph Psamathe, is killed by a stone discus thrown at him deliberately by his half-brother Peleus, who is motivated, in this version, by a desire to please his mother Endeis, stepmother of Phocus. Peleus is condemned and exiled along with his brother Telamon who, though he pleads innocent, is regarded as an accomplice.

Main variants[11]
No stepmotherly interference; motive is jealousy of half-brother: all other accounts except Diod. Sic., 4.72.6 who represents the death as an accident.

Both brothers involved: Apollod., 3.12.6., Hyg., *Fab.* 14.8., Ant. Lib., *Met.* 38., Lact. Plac. ad Stat., *Theb.* 2.113., Schol. Eur., *Andr.* 687., Schol. Pind., *Nem.* 5.25a., Tzetz. Lyc., 175.

Peleus alone responsible: Eur., *Andr.* 685ff. and Schol. ad loc., Ov., *Met.* 11.267., Lact. Plac. ad Stat., *Theb.* 2.113., Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 16.14.

Telamon alone responsible: Dorotheos ap. Plut., *Parall. Min.* 25A.

[11] N.B. in this case the 'variants' are the canonical version of the myth, the stepmother element being unusual. See Papamichael (1983b), 147–50.

12. *Siris*: a murderous foster-mother[12] (Euripides, *Melanippe Desmotis*, *TGF*[2] F 489–514; Webster 150–7.)
The behaviour of Siris towards her foster-children is stepmotherly in its nature and underlying motivation. Siris, wife of Metapontus, threatened with divorce if she fails to produce an heir, introduces as her own the twin sons (by Poseidon) of Melanippe, who are being brought up by herdsmen after being exposed. Eventually Siris induces her brothers to kill the young men on a hunt to prevent them becoming her husband's heirs. A fight ensues in which the brothers of Siris are killed; she commits suicide; Melanippe's twins rescue their mother who has been imprisoned in the palace, sent there by her father. In a final happy conclusion, Metapontus takes Melanippe as his wife, adopting her sons as his heirs.

Main Variants
Foster-mother called Theano: Hyg., *Fab.* 186.

Sons (rather than brothers) induced to attack the twins: Hyg., *Fab.*186 (N.B. in this version, Theano is even more stepmotherly than Siris, for her motive is to remove the supposititious pair favoured by Metapontus in order to obtain the kingdom for the sons that she herself bore some time after the substitution).

Foster-mother called Autolyte; twins' mother Arne (she is granddaughter of Melanippe): Diod. Sic., 4.67.2 (in this version, the fight is between Arne and Autolyte; the latter is killed by the twins defending their mother; the three survivors flee).

13. *Rhea* (Dionysius Skytobrachion ap. Diod. Sic., 3.68ff.)
This Libyan myth offers an alternative version of the birth of Dionysus, whereby he is the illegitimate son of the Libyan king Ammon, husband of Rhea. To save the boy from his stepmother's jealousy, Ammon gives him into the care of Aristaeus and his daughter Nysa to be reared; Athena is assigned the task of protecting Dionysus from the plots of Rhea. When Dionysus grows up and becomes famous, Rhea,

[12] Another possible case of a malevolent foster-mother is the wife of Creon in Euripides' *Alcmaeon at Corinth*, who plots to return her foster-daughter Tisiphone to her father through jealousy (Apollod., 3.7.7) and presumably is also anxious to be rid of her foster-son Amphilochus whom Creon wants as his heir: see Webster (1967) 267.

angered at Ammon, is eager to get Dionysus in her power. Being unable to do so she deserts Ammon and marries her brother Cronos whom she persuades to make war on Ammon. Ammon is defeated, Cronos then attacks Dionysus. At this point the story takes an unusual turn which sharply distinguishes it from the Greek myths. Dionysus is eventually victorious and magnanimously spares his enemies; it is not, however, his stepmother who remains unreconciled, but Cronos: Rhea, when entreated by Dionysus to regard him henceforth as her son, meekly agrees.

14. *Eeriboea* (Homer, *Iliad* 5.385ff.)
The story of Eeriboea's involvement in the life of the Aloadae, Otus and Ephialtes, is mentioned as one of several *exempla* of attacks by mortals on divinities. The Aloadae attempted to destroy Ares by shutting him up in a jar for thirteen months; their plan was foiled when their stepmother, Eeriboea, informed on them to Hermes, who set Ares free.

Variant
Stepmother element in story missing: Apollod., 1.7.4.

15. *Hera*
Although Hera differs in several respects from most of the other stepmothers discussed above,[13] her behaviour towards the various illegitimate children of Zeus can readily be described as stepmotherly: for the Romans, at any rate, Juno became the wicked stepmother *par excellence*.

(i) *The persecution of Heracles*
On learning that a child was soon to be born who would rule all other men, Hera is said to have employed her powers as goddess of childbirth to delay Alcmena's delivery, while simultaneously effecting the premature arrival of Eurystheus, later to become king of Mycenae

[13] She is not a classic stepmother in the sense that she is raising the child of a previous marriage or relationship on the part of her husband; more importantly, she is not referred to as stepmother until Plato: see more detailed discussion in Appendix 2.

and Tiryns (Hom., *Iliad* 19.90ff.). Hera's constant attempts to destroy Heracles once he was born began in the cradle, when she sent snakes to attack the infant (Pind., *Nem.* 1.33 (50) ff.): not only did the plot fail, but Heracles' feat in strangling the monsters while his terrified twin howled in the background[14] only served to provide confirmation to all that Heracles was indeed the son of Zeus. In Hesiod (*Theog.* 314f.), Hera is said to have reared the Lernean Hydra for Heracles, though it is not until the time of Ovid that the goddess is depicted as sending monsters directly against the hero.[15] Perhaps the most callous of all the deeds attributed to Hera was her rôle in driving Heracles to a madness that resulted in his murdering his wife and children, a theme that formed the plot of Euripides' *Heracles*. As with many wicked stepmothers, Hera's behaviour did not go unpunished. Heracles is said to have wounded Hera in the breast (*Iliad* 5.390); also from the *Iliad* comes the remarkable story of how Zeus hung his wife up by her ankles from Olympus to punish her for sending storms to drive Heracles to Cos (*Iliad* 15. 18–24; cf. Apollod., 1.3.5, 2.7.1).

(ii) *Apollo and Artemis* (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 1–139.)
When Leto was about to give birth to her offspring by Zeus, Artemis and Apollo, she was forced to wander over the earth because no land was prepared to give birth to one as great as Apollo. After Leto was eventually accepted by Delos, the birth was further delayed by the jealous Hera, who stopped Ilithyia from going to Leto's aid.

Main variant
Hera is responsible for Leto's wanderings: Pind. frg. 33d Maehler, Callim., *Hymn* 4.34–40, 191–4 (Iris and Ares sent by Hera to guard every land, thus ensuring that none will acept Leto).

(iii) *Dionysus* (Eur., *Bacch.* 9., *Cyc.* 3., Apollod., 3.4.3 (cf. also Pl., *Leg.* 2.672b.)
The consumption by lightning of Dionysus' mother Semele is said to have been the result of a plot by Hera to prevent Dionysus' birth: Hera persuaded Semele to induce her lover to grant any wish she desired, and then to ask as her wish that Zeus appear to her in his

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[14] For good illustrations of this scene in art, cf. *LIMC* I.2 414f., s.v. Alkmene 8,16.
[15] Ov., *Ars* 2.217 'fatigata praebendo monstra' ('weary of providing monsters').

true form, which—as Hera well knew—must result in Semele's destruction. The goddess was later responsible for inflicting madness upon Dionysus, which inspired his wanderings in Eastern lands.

(iv) *Tityos* (Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 F 55; Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 1.761f., Apollod., 1.4.1.)
When Elare was pregnant by Zeus, he saved both her and the child Tityos from the machinations of Hera by hiding her under the earth.

(v) *Lamia's children* (Duris, *FGrH* 76 F 17; cf. Diod. Sic., 20.41.3., Schol. Ar., *Pax* 758., *Vesp.* 1035.)
Hera killed all the children that Lamia bore to Zeus, forcing this bereaved mother into the rôle of child-stealer.

(vi) *Epaphus* (Apollod., 2.1.3., Hyg., *Fab.*150.)
When Hera saw that Io's son, Epaphus, had become a powerful ruler in Egypt, her habitual jealousy prompted her to arrange for his disposal.[16]

(vii) *Zagreus* (Diod. Sic., 3.62., Nonn., *Dion.* 6.169–210., Orpheus, fr. 210ff. Kern; cf. Rose (1958) 51, Slater (1968) 264–70.)
In an Orphic variation on the birth of Dionysus, Zeus copulates with his own daughter Persephone in serpent form: the offspring, Zagreus (identified with Dionysus), is killed and eaten by the Titans at the instigation of the jealous Hera; Athena, however, saves the heart, which Zeus swallows, begetting the child a second time on Semele.

B. *The Amorous Stepmother*

1. *Phaedra* (Euripides, *Hippolytus* I,*TGF*[2] F 428–447., Sophocles, *Phaedra*, *TrGF* IV F 677–93., Apollod., *Epit.* 1.17–19., Paus., 1.22.1ff.; Webster (1967) 65–71.)
Phaedra, the wife of Theseus, by whom she has two sons, conceives a passion for her stepson Hippolytus, the illegitimate offspring of

[16] Apollod., 2.1.3 says Hera asked the Curetes to make him disappear: they hid him and he was later found by Io; Hyg., *Fab.* 150 says Hera had him killed while hunting: his source may have used the same verb as Apollodorus (ἀφανίζω= 'cause to disappear'), which Hyginus interpreted as meaning to kill: cf. Rose ad loc.

Theseus and the Amazon Antiope;[17] when he rejects her advances she accuses him falsely of rape to his father, who banishes his son, invoking one of three curses granted him by Poseidon. Hippolytus is killed when his horses and chariot are overthrown by a monstrous bull which Poseidon sends from the sea in answer to Theseus' prayer. Phaedra hangs herself in fear of reprisal when her husband learns the truth.

Main variants

Character of Phaedra ameliorated:

(i) Soph. *Phaedra*: Theseus absent in the underworld, believed dead.[18]

(ii) Sen. *Phaedra*: Phaedra's suicide comes after voluntarily confession of guilt and is occasioned by remorse.

(iii) Eur., *Hippolytus* II: The heroine of Euripides' second *Hippolytus* is portrayed as an innocent victim of Aphrodite who refuses to give in to her passion, and who bears little resemblance to the brazen would-be adulteress of the basic myth.[19] This change in characterisation is effected by altering some of the non-essential details of the legend. For instance, it is Phaedra's nurse who makes the overtures to a horrified Hippolytus against her mistress' will, Phaedra having determined to die rather than have Hippolytus learn of her passion. Likewise, the false accusation is placed after her suicide (she leaves a note instead of addressing Theseus directly) which gives her the honorable motivation of fearing for the reputation of her children. She does, it is true, remark that her death will teach Hippolytus not to be unsympathetic towards her agony (lines 729ff.), but the force of these words, though they show a desire to hurt her stepson, is softened by the fact that he is characterised in such as way that his

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[17] Sometimes called Hippolyte, e.g. Isae., 12.193., Cleidemus, *FGrH* 323 F 18.

[18] So Barrett (1964) 12: there may have been other changes (e.g. she did not make the approach to Hippolytus in person), but evidence is lacking. On Sophocles' play see also Kiso (1973), Zwierlein (1987) 55–62.

[19] It was apparently the audience's distaste for seeing a completely shameless woman portrayed on the stage that was responsible for the failure of the first *Hippolytus* and caused Euripides in his second version to tone down Phaedra's character. March (1990) 32–75, however, suggests that though Phaedra was represented as wicked she was also tragic—thus, the audience's adverse reaction was not merely to seeing a wicked woman on the stage but to seeing such a woman treated as a tragic figure capable of exciting pity. Griffin (1990) 131–2, suggests that audience reaction would have been an insufficient reason for Euripides to write a second play, and that he was prompted more by the 'artistic challenge' of presenting the myth in a more subtle fashion.

behaviour towards Phaedra is not that of the wronged innocent who is merely uninterested in sex and appalled at the suggestion of disloyalty to his father, but rather that of a smug, intolerant spurner of the goddess Aphrodite who in his offensive puritanism is riding for a fall. Thus any thoughts of revenge on Phaedra's part are not presented as simple unmotivated spite.[20]

Other variants

Theseus does not at first believe the accusation; he sends for Hippolytus to question him, Phaedra commits suicide in fear, and Hippolytus' emotional reaction at hearing of the charge while he is driving his horses leads him to have a fatal accident: Diod. Sic., 4.62.3.

Hippolytus restored to life by Asclepius at Artemis' bequest: author of *Naupactica* ap. Apollod., 3.10.3 (6th century?)., Pind., *Pyth.* 3.54 (96)ff. with Schol., Hyg., *Fab.* 49 etc.

Hippolytus, restored to life, transferred to Diana's sanctuary at Aricia near Rome as Virbius: Callim., *Aet.* (? see Pfeiffer on fr.190)., Verg., *Aen.* 7.761ff., Ov., *Fast.* 3.263ff., 6.735ff., *Met.* 15.297ff.

2. *Idaea* (Sophocles, *Phineus* A, *TrGF* IV F 704–717a., Apollod., 3.15.3., cf. 1.9.21; Hyg., *Fab.*19., Serv. Verg., *Aen.* 3.209., Schol. Soph., *Ant.* 980., Schol. Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 2.207ff., 178., Schol. Ov., *Ib.* 271 etc.)

The two sons of Phineus and Cleopatra were blinded by their father after they had been falsely accused of attempted rape by their stepmother Idaea (or Eidothea). The stepmother was killed. Although the reason for the stepmother's false accusation is not given, one may suppose that, like Phaedra, she had made unsuccessful amorous advances to one or both of Phineus' sons.[21] On this assumption, I include her under the heading of amorous stepmothers.

Main variants

Stepmother blinds the stepsons with her own hand: Soph., *Ant.* 970ff.,

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[20] For Phaedra's essential innocence see, for instance, Barrett (1964) 14–15, Conacher (1967) 27,48, Griffin (1990) 133. For a different approach, see Rabinowitz (1993) 155–69, who argues that Phaedra' s revenge is not meant to be regarded as admirable: she is at fault in failing to keep within the parameters set by society for women (i.e. silence, lack of concern for public repute).

[21] Unless she is merely acting out of malice. For a discussion of the myth see Bouvier and Moreau (1983).

Tympanistae (?)[22]
Sons are restored by Asclepius; they kill stepmother: Soph., *Phineus* A(?)[23]; Diod. Sic., 4.43.44 (they are about to kill stepmother when Heracles intervenes; they return her to her father who performs the deed himself), *AP* 3.4.

Cleopatra, divorced by Phineus, and resentful of new wife, incites sons to make sexual assault on stepmother: Diod. Sic., 4.43.44., *AP* 3.4; alternatively, the mother blinds her own sons herself: Schol. Soph., *Ant.* 980, who attributes it to several anonymous writers (τινὲς ἱστοροῦσιν).

3. *Astymedusa* (Schol. Homer, *Iliad* 4.376., Eust. Hom., *Iliad* 4.376ff.)
This story provides an alternative explanation for the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices. After divorcing Iocasta, Oedipus married Astymedusa, who falsely accused her stepsons (Polynices and Eteocles) of rape. Oedipus uttered a curse that his sons would only come into their inheritance in the midst of bloodshed.

Variant
Astymedusa the third wife of Oedipus, taken after the death of Euryganeia (his second wife, and the mother of his children rather than Iocasta): Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 F 95 (no mention of her stepmotherly plot).

4. *Philonome* (Euripides, *Tennes.*,[24] Lyc., *Alex.* 232 with Tzetz. ad loc., Diod. Sic., 5.83.4., Conon, *FGrH* 26 F 1; Apollod., *Epit.* 3.24., Paus., 10.14.2–3., Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 1.38.; Jouan (1966) 303–8.)
Tennes, together with his sister Hemithea, was cast into an ark by his father Cycnus, after having been falsely accused by his stepmother Philonome (or Phylonome), using as her witness the flute-player

[22] Jessen (in Roscher (1897–1909) 2362) suggested that this play included this variant to distinguish it from the Phineus, but this is very uncertain: see Pearson (1917), 313f. for discussion, also Radt, *TrGF* IV 458ff., Sutton (1984) 107, who points out that the subject of the *Tympanistae* could have been entirely different.
[23] According to Pearson (1917) 313.
[24] See *POxy* XXVII no. 2455 fr. 14 col. xiii lines 179–80. On the authenticity of the play, see W. Luppe, "Zum Tennes-Mythos im 'Mythographus Homericus' P.Hamb. 199", *ZPE* 56 (1984) 31f., Dana F. Sutton, *Two Lost Plays of Euripides* (New York: 1987) 85–7.

Eumolpus; he came to land on an island which was subsequently known as Tenedos. The stepmother was later executed by her husband after the truth was discovered (Apollod., *Epit.* 3.25., Tzetz. Lyc., 232.)

Main variant

Stepmother also known as Polyboea (Eust. Hom., *Iliad* 1.38) or Calyce (Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 1.38.).

5. *Demodice* (Schol. Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.288.)

In this story, Phrixus' escape on the ram comes about as the result of a rejection by him of amorous advances on the part of of his stepmother Demodice, followed by the inevitable false accusation.

Main variants

Name of stepmother (see Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 4.288): Demodice (Pind., *Hymns*), Themisto (Pherecydes), Nephele (Sophocles, *Athamas*), Gorgopis (Hippias).

Demodice is wife of Phrixus' paternal uncle Cretheus: [Hyg.], *Astr.* 2.20.

6. *Phthia* (Euripides, *Phoenix*, *TGF*[2] F 804–818., Sophocles, *Phoenix*, *TrGF* IV F 718–20., Ion, *TGF*[2] p.739–41., Astydamas, *TGF*[2] p. 777., Apollod., 3.13.8., Schol. Hom., *Iliad* 9.437–84., Schol. Pl., *Leg.* 11 p. 931B.; Webster (1967) 84–5, Jouan (1966) 60–1.)

Phthia, the concubine of Phoenix' father Amyntor, falsely accuses the young man after he has rejected her: the son is blinded by the father. It is questionable whether she was regarded as a μητρυιά, since stepmothers are normally the legal wives of their husbands, even though the stepchild whom they mistreat or with whom they fall in love may be the son of a concubine. The story is nevertheless another example of the Phaedra type, even if the amorous woman is not a stepmother in the usual sense of the term.

Main variants

Phoenix attempts to seduce his father's concubine at the bidding of his jealous mother; he is forced to flee into exile in Phthia: Hom., *Iliad* 9. 437ff., *AP* 3.3., Tzetz. Lyc., 421.

Phoenix' sight restored by Chiron: Prop., 2. 1.60., Apollod., 3.13.8., Tzetz. Lyc., 421.

APPENDIX TWO

ORIGINS OF THE STEPMOTHER MYTHS

1. *Stepmothers Prior to the 5th Century*

(i) *Hera*

Zeus' habitual marital infidelities are an old theme in Greek mythology. In the famous passage from *Iliad* 14 where Hera's seduction of her husband is described, Zeus, with superb lack of tact, offers a catalogue of previous amours (and their products) in order to make the point that he has never known such passion as he feels on the present occasion (lines 313ff.). Although no reference is made here to jealousy on Hera's part, the enmity of the goddess towards her most famous 'stepson' Heracles, is well-established elsewhere in the poem. Apart from general allusions (e.g. at 18.119 the thought that no one can escape death is illustrated by the fact that even mighty Heracles was laid low by Fate and the χόλος"Ηρης ('wrath of Hera'), there are references to specific incidents: Hera's attempts to delay Alcmena's delivery (19.90ff.), the tale of Hera sending Heracles off in a tempest to Cos, where he had to be rescued by an irate Zeus (15.24ff), and the stories of Hera's punishment for her treatment of Heracles. Other manifestations of Hera's malevolence towards Heracles, however, are known only from literature of a later date: for instance, her attack on him in the cradle is first alluded to by Pindar (*Nem.* 1.33ff.), while her rôle in driving Heracles to the madness that resulted in his murdering his wife and children, is first found in Euripides' *Heracles.*[1] As to the famous labours, traditionally imposed upon Heracles by Eurystheus, Hera is made indirectly responsible for these as early as *Iliad* 19 in the sense that by accelerating the birth of Eurystheus (and thus enabling him to become ruler of both Mycenae and Tiryns), she prepares the way for Heracles' future enslavement to the king. Though Hesiod (*Theog.* 314f.) mentions that Hera reared the Lernean Hydra for Heracles, it is not until the time

[1] Since, however, the theme of Heracles' madness was mentioned by earlier poets (e.g. Stesichorus, *PMG* fr.230, Panyassis, *EGF* fr.20), it is possible, if not likely, that the madness was attributed to Hera before Euripides.

of Ovid (*Ars 2.217*) that the goddess is said to have sent monsters directly against the hero.

Of Hera's plots against other 'stepchildren', the only example for which there is early evidence is her attempt to obstruct the birth of Apollo and Artemis, a story that is first told in the Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo, dated to the 7th century. Note that in this earliest account Leto's wanderings are attributed not to Hera, but rather to the fact that no land has the courage to give birth to Apollo: Hera merely tries to prevent Ilithyia aiding Leto after she has finally arrived on Delos. The version of the myth used by Callimachus in his 4th Hymn, where Hera herself is made responsible for Leto's wanderings, is possibly his own addition. In the case of Dionysus, Hera's enmity towards him must have been introduced early, since the story of the revenge taken on Athamas and Ino for the latter's nursing of the infant Dionysus appears in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*. On the other hand, the first mention of Hera in connection with the consumption by lightning of Semele is in Euripides,[2] likewise we have no evidence earlier than Euripides of Hera mistreating the god himself. It has been suggested, in fact, that the attribution to Hera of Dionysus' madness, alluded to by Euripides in the *Cyclops* (line 3), was invented to explain the description μαινόμενος ('in a frenzy') at *Iliad* 6.132.[3] The first definite mention of the story in which Zeus hides Elare, pregnant with Tityos, under the earth, is in Pherecydes (5th century). Although the description in Homer of Tityos as 'earth born' might be an allusion to this myth, it is equally likely that Pherecydes' story is a later invention to explain the Homeric epithet. Finally, the attribution of the death of Lamia's children to Hera may be no earlier than Duris (4–3rd cent.), while the tale of Epaphus, son of Io, is known only from accounts in Apollodorus and Hyginus.

Hera, then, is portrayed in our earliest texts as indulging in stepmotherly behaviour, though many of the details were apparently added at a later date. She appears more stepmotherly over a period of time, as stories of her malevolence proliferate, and she acquires an ever-increasing number of 'stepchildren'.

In view of her reputation, it is surprising that Hera is not, as far as we know, referred to as μητρυιά before the middle of the 4th

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[2] Though it is possible that Hera tempted Semele to her destruction in the lost *Semele* of Aeschylus: see Dodds (1960) Introduction xxx.

[3] See Dodds (1960) 84.

century. The earliest extant writer to make the connection is Plato, who uses the term μητρυιά with relation to Hera's persecution of Dionysus.[4] It is not until the Roman period that Hera is described as the stepmother of Heracles (Diod. Sic., 4.9.7 (1st century BC); cf. Verg., *Aen.* 8.288). Though it is possible that earlier writers regarded it as self-evident that Hera's behaviour towards Heracles and others was stepmotherly in character, the frequent occurrence of allusions to Hera as μητρυιά or *noverca* from the 1st century on contrasts sharply with their absence in earlier literature. This is especially apparent in contexts where the rôle of Hera as stepmother might be expected to have been stressed. In Euripides' *Heracles*, for instance, where the madness of the hero is attributed solely to the anger of Hera, the poet fails to take advantage of the opportunity to refer to the goddess as Heracles' stepmother. Here, we may contrast the *Hercules Furens* of Seneca, where Juno's rôle as *noverca* is emphasised, especially in the prologue.[5] Similarly, in the case of Dionysus, Euripides in the *Bacchae* has the god, speaking the Prologue, allude to the tomb of Semele and the ruins of her home as ἀθάνατον Ἥρας μητέρ' εἰς ἐμὴν ὕβριν "the undying violence of Hera against my mother"(line 9). Hera's wrath is viewed as having as its recipient not Dionysus but his mother, Hera's rival.

Another fact to be taken into consideration when deciding whether or not Hera was regarded as stepmother prior to the 4th century is that Hera is not a stepmother in the standard sense. In the myths, the term μητρυιά applies for the most part to wives raising their husband's children by a previous union; it also refers to those (e.g. Medea, Creusa) asked to accept into their household, as their husband's heir, his grown son by another woman. Although Creusa's case is close to the situation of Hera in that her 'stepson' is supposedly the product of a sexual relationship on the part of her husband during her own marriage rather than prior to it, there are notable differences. Hera does not have to accept Zeus' bastards into her household: in contrast to other stepmothers stories,[6] the stepchild's real mother is not (apart from Semele!) dead or absent, and the inheritance question is not of primary concern.[7]

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[4] *Leg.* 2.672b.4, dated to c. 350 .

[5] See discussion of the play in chapter 4.

[6] An exception is Hermione, who has Andromache living in her house with her, but Hermione is not a stepmother proper.

[7] It is true that this is a special case, in that as the eternal ruler Zeus cannot have

In Homer and commonly elsewhere in Greek literature, Hera is portrayed not as a stepmother but as the bitter, jealous wife of an incorrigible philanderer. Unlike the typical μητρυιά who has to cope only with the offspring of one former union, Hera is continually confronted with the products of infidelity on the part of her husband and also with her rivals. The theme of sexual jealousy as the main motivating factor in Hera's behaviour is underlined by the fact that her wrath is directed not only at Zeus' illegitimate children but also at their mothers.[8] In every case, in fact, except that of Heracles, it is the paramour of Zeus who suffers, rather than, or in addition to, her offspring. It is true that Hera's treatment of Zeus' mistresses is sometimes prompted not only by sexual jealousy but by the stepmotherly motive of fear that the women will bear to Zeus an offspring better or more powerful than her own. For instance, she prolongs Leto's birth-pangs because she is envious that Leto is to bear a υἱὸν ἀμύμονά τε κρατερόν τε "a son more distinguished and mightier".[9] But this suffering is not always inflicted simply because of jealousy that the child whom the woman is carrying is destined to achieve greatness. Think, for instance, of the sufferings of Io, driven in mad frenzy in the form of a cow,[10] or of Hera's treatment of Callisto, changed to a bear, and later, as a constellation, refused permission, along with her son, to set in the Ocean.[11]

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heirs, but contrast Seneca's *Her.F.* where Juno's main concern, as a *noverca*, is that Heracles is attempting to overthrow Zeus, in other words to become his father's 'heir': see further on this in chapter 4.

[8] And, on occasion, other persons (e.g. Ino and Athamas are persecuted for their rôle in nursing the infant Dionysus). Conversely, those who refuse to co-operate with Zeus are rewarded, e.g. when Thetis was barred by Zeus from marrying any of the immortals because she had rejected the god's advances, Hera offered her compensation in the form of the noblest mortal, Peleus (Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 4.790ff).

[9] *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 100; cf. Callim., *Hymn* 4. 55–58, where she is jealous that Apollo will be dearer to Zeus than Ares. Hera's case is special in that, although she is the goddess of marriage and childbirth, her owns sons are anything but impressive: she bears a constant grudge because she herself has produced only the troublesome Ares (in Homer the most unpopular of all the gods) and the deformed Hephaestus, while the more important of Zeus' sons—Apollo, Heracles, Dionysus and the like—are all his offspring by other women.

[10] First known from Bacchylides (*Dithyramb* 18) and Aesch., *Supp.* 299. Io's story was treated in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, though whether her sufferings were attributed to Hera is unclear. Hera's persecution of Io's child Epaphus may be a later addition to the story.

[11] Callisto first appears in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (fr. 163 Merk.-W.); cf.Hes.(?) fr. 354 where it is said that Arcas and his mother as stars were not permitted to set due to the anger of Hera. See *LIMC* V 940 s.v. Kallisto.

In sum, I would suggest that in Classical Greek literature Hera's treatment of Heracles and Zeus' other illegitimate offspring was thought of as exemplifying wifely jealousy rather than stepmotherly malevolence. Since, however, much of her behaviour was stepmotherly in motivation, it was a natural step to regard this behaviour in terms of a stepmother's hatred for her husband's bastard son. Later writers did this, perhaps taking their lead from Plato, but it was only in the Roman period that Hera eventually became the evil stepmother *par excellence.*[12]

(ii) *Stepmothers in Epic*

If we discount the problematical case of Hera, malevolent stepmothers are rarely found in the Homeric poems. There is the story (*Iliad* 5.385ff.) of Eeriboea, stepmother of the Aloadae, who reported her stepsons' imprisonment of the god Ares; since, however, the emphasis in this myth lies on the impious behaviour of the stepsons, it is by no means clear that Eeriboea is to be regarded as evil. Is she a heroine who saved the life of a god, or a wicked stepmother who tried to seized on an excellent opportunity to rid herself of her unwanted stepsons? The answer probably lies somewhere in between: tale-tellers in mythology rarely receive sympathetic treatment and although they sometimes suffer punishment at the hands of the person whose behaviour they have disclosed (e.g. Ascalaphus is changed into a *bubo* ('owl') by Persephone for revealing that she has eaten the pomegranate seeds),[13] in some cases their gossipping is viewed as reprehensible for its own sake. For instance, when Coroneus' daughter, metamorphosed into a crow, tells Pallas that Aglauros has disobeyed the orders of the goddess by looking into the secret box in which Erichthonius was hidden, the goddess reacts not by expressing gratitude for the information, but by dismissing the tattle-tale as her attendant.[14] We might also think of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where the

[12] For a different view of Hera, see Slater (1968) esp. 229, 282–4 (re Dionysus) and 337–51 (re Heracles): he argues that Hera was always conceived as a stepmother i.e. a malevolent mother-figure, though her relationship with Heracles is ambivalent (as suggested by Heracles' name and by incidents such as the one where she suckles the infant Heracles (Diod Sic., 4.9., Paus., 9.25.2., [Hyg.], *Astr.* 2.43) since she represents both positive and negative sides of the mother.

[13] Ov., *Met.* 5.538ff. Apollod., 1.5.3 preserves a different version where Demeter lays on him a heavy stone in Hades; cf. Euphorion, fr. 9.13–15 Powell.

[14] Ov., *Met.* 2.550ff. Cf. the story of Coronis—when the raven tells Apollo that Coronis has a lover, Apollo kills Coronis but repents and then vents his anger on

nurse, although well-meaning, receives in return for her revelation of the truth to Hippolytus only bitter condemnation on the part of Phaedra for her interference.

The actions of Eeriboea, then, might be viewed in an unfavourable light because she is a tale-teller and because, as a stepmother, her motives are automatically suspect. She may thus be classed among malicious stepmothers, but is far from being a typical murderous μητρυιά, especially since her stepchildren are not the usual innocent victims of an unprovoked attack on the part of an evil woman; on the contrary, they are paradigms of impiety—not only did they attack Ares, but it was this same pair of precocious giants who piled Pelion on Ossa in an attempt to reach Olympus and who attempted to seduce Hera and Artemis and were destroyed for their *hubris* before they reached manhood.[15]

Apart from the case of the mildly malicious Eeriboea, relationships between stepmothers and their stepchildren are surprisingly cordial in the Homeric epics, despite the existence of social conditions which might be expected to provide a breeding ground for jealous stepmothers. The most conspicuous example of such conditions is the Trojan royal family, where king Priam is depicted as polygamous. Though Priam's heir, Hector, is the son of his chief wife Hecuba, he shows considerable favour to the offspring of other wives and concubines. Lycaon and Polydorus, sons of Priam's wife Laothe, are so dear to him (as is Laothe herself) that he is prepared to offer a large sum for their ransom (*Iliad* 22. 48). The second of these, Polydorus, is said elsewhere to be the youngest and best beloved of all Priam's children (*Iliad* 20. 408ff.). Little distinction is made between legitimate and illegitimate sons. Isos fights in the same chariot as his half-brother (*Iliad* 11.101f.), and though Cebriones, as charioteer to Hector, occupies a position subordinate to his half-brother, he is nonetheless one of the most prominent of the Trojan leaders (*Iliad* 12. 91f., 13.70) and it is over his corpse that Hector fights Patroclus (*Iliad* 16.751ff.). Given Hecuba's marital circumstances, it

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the raven, forbidding him to take his place among the white birds (see Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3F3, Ov., *Met* 2.599ff., Hyg., *Fab.* 202., Apollod., 3.10.3 etc.).

[15] According to Hom., *Od.* 11.305ff., the twins were destroyed by Apollo for their attempt to reach Olympus by piling Ossa on Pelion; Apollodorus (1.7.4) presents their death, at the hands of Artemis, partly as punishment for the Ares affair, partly as an act of revenge by Artemis, whom Otus had attempted to rape (while Ephialtes had made a similar attempt on Hera). Cf. *LIMC* I.1 p. 570–2 s.v. Aloadai.

is remarkable that no conflicts are mentioned, such as those recorded in the parallel historical case of Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great.[16]

In fact, Hecuba is made to bear with complete equanimity Priam's devotion to his various sons by other wives and concubines, nor do we hear of jealousy on the part of the women concerned.[17]

Although the Trojan Priam's polygamy is anomalous, the position of bastards is also comparatively favourable elsewhere in the Homeric poems: unlike Classical Athens, where νόθοι had no rights of inheritance in any circumstances,[18] in Homeric society it seems to have been open to a father to treat a νόθος as legitimate if he chose to do so. Patterson (1990), 48,50, argues that this only happened where there were no legitimate sons, or if the offspring were female, as in the case of Menelaus' heir Megapenthes, sired by Menelaus from a slave after Helen had produced only a daughter, Hermione (cf. *Od.* 4.10–14). This view, however, fails to take into account cases such as that of Pedaios, illegitimate son of the Trojan Antenor, who was raised by Antenor's wife Theano on an equal footing with her own sons in order to please her husband (*Iliad* 5.69).[19] And in the *Odyssey*, there is Odysseus' false story about his past (*Od.* 14.202ff.), in which he claims to be a νόθος who was treated by his father on equal terms with his legitimate sons: it was only after the father's death, according to this story, that his half-brothers ganged up on him to allot him a lesser share of his fathers' estate.[20]

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[16] The domestic arrangements of Philip's court, in which several wives lived together with their offspring in the palace, presented a situation ripe for stepmotherly jealousies (Athen., 13.557b-e). For discussion of Olympias, see chapter 7.

[17] Presumably Hecuba feels secure as principal wife and mother of the heir; the other women would, however, have had cause for resentment.

[18] I.e. they could not even inherit in the absence of legitimate sons. See further the discussion in chapter 3.

[19] Cf. Euripides has Andromache say (*Andr.* 224f.), as proof of her wifely devotion, that she often gave the breast to various νόθοι of Hector. Sealey (1990) 112–3 argues that bastards had no automatic rights of inheritance but that their inferior position could be overlooked by the father provided his wife was agreeable.

[20] Patterson (1990),50, mentions this as a case where the son does not inherit even though he is favoured by his father, thus showing that νόθοι had no inheritance rights. What it does show, rather, is that, in the absence of wills, a νόθος had no legal redress against half-brothers who acted overbearingly towards him (Odysseus describes the brothers as ὑπέρθυμοι 209), disregarding the wishes of their father. Cf. also the attacks on Chrysippus by Atreus and his brothers, and on Phocus by Telamon and Peleus, in each case prompted by the father's preference for the νόθος: the legitimate sons must have felt this as threatening.

In such a society, one might expect to find stories of disputes between wives and their (illegitimate) stepsons who might pose a real threat to their own children's chances of inheritance. This is not, however, the case. On the contrary, characters are encountered like Theano (mentioned above) who obliges her husband by raising his νόθος along with her own sons: that such a story could have arisen highlights the absence of the stepmother theme at this period.[21] The only tale of family conflict in the *Iliad* (apart from the folktale-like story of Eeriboea, discussed earlier) is that of Phoenix's seduction of his father's concubine at the behest of his mother (*Iliad* 9. 437ff.), and here the emphasis is on wifely jealousy: contrast the version preferred in later times in which the concubine attempts to seduce the son, thus acting the part of the amorous stepmother. There is some indication of a change in the society depicted in the Odyssey,[22] in that conflicts over inheritance are recognised: I have already referred to the invented story of Odysseus: note that no stepmother plays a rôle in this dispute between half-brothers. Another possible reference to inheritance disputes is the story (*Odyssey* 1.429f) that Laertes, Odysseus' father, avoided sleeping with his housekeeper Eurycleia, though honouring her as much as a wife, through fear of his wife's χόλος ('wrath'). It has been suggested,[23] that this χόλος might have extended to any children of the relationship who could threaten the position of the wife's children as their father's heirs—which would give us a potential malevolent stepmother—but the reference may simply be to sexual jealousy on the part of the wife, in other words, to a situation similar to that depicted in the Iliadic version of the Phoenix story.

In contrast to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* , the poems of the Epic Cycle may have contained stepmothers. Jasper Griffin[24] has pointed out that, whereas the Homeric Helen and Paris have no children and

[21] Also, Helen does not seem to object to Menelaus' son being his heir. It is true that she has no sons of her own, but contrast the reaction of Euripides' Hermione (in the *Andromache*) and Creusa (in the *Ion*). It is noteworthy, however, that Theano, the good stepmother, is a prophetess and along with her husband Antenor, a paradigm of virtue (Antenor supported the return of Helen on moral grounds and he and his family were spared during the sack of Troy).

[22] Cf. Lacey (1968) 42, arguing for a change in attitude between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for example, he thinks Menelaus' bastard is introduced 'rather apologetically'.

[23] Vernant (1980) 54.

[24] (1977), 39ff.

Odysseus only one, in the Cyclic poems a number of offspring are attributed to the heroes. The Cyclic world is one that is "liberally populated by half-brothers". Such a milieu may well have generated jealous stepmothers, given also that there was a greater element in Cyclic epic of violence, romance and intrigue. There is, however, no definite indication that this was the case in the fragmentary remains of these poems and the (incomplete) summary of the contents of some of them by Proclus.

(iii) *Medea and Theseus*

It was suggested by C. Sourvinou-Inwood that the Theseus/ Medea myth was created in its original form in the lost epic the *Theseid*, towards the end of the 6th century, under anti-Peisistratid influence:[25] the victory of the outsider, the real heir to the throne, against the wicked stepmother, represents the overthrowing of the Peisistratids by Cleisthenes (=Theseus) and the Alcmaeonids. Sourvinou-Inwood further argued, however, that the original stepmother was not Medea, but that this lady was appropriately incorporated into the myth after the Persian wars, perhaps by the historian Pherecydes.[26]

(iv) *The stepmother of Phrixus*

Though the story of Phrixus'[27] journey on the Golden Ram is of early date,[28] concrete evidence for the involvement of his stepmother Ino in the tale is lacking before the 5th century. It is generally agreed that the legend of Phrixus' narrow escape from death by sacrifice was originally an aetion for rites connected with the worship in

[25] (1979) 27.

[26] (1979) 53, 55.

[27] Helle is probably a later addition: A. Lesky, "Hellos-Hellotis", *WS* 46 (1927–8) 128, suggested that monuments showing Helle alone (e.g. Jacobsthal (1931) no. 69 taf.33, dated to the mid 5th century) reflect a separate tradition in which she was a local heroine, riding Poseidon in ram shape as Europa rode on the bull; a reference in Aesch. *Pers.* 70 (472BC) to Helle, daughter of Athamas, as connected with the name of the Hellespont, suggests that the myth of Phrixus and Helle was known to Aeschylus.

[28] The story was referred to in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, compiled in the 6th century but probably based on material evolved no later than the 8th (see West (1985) 130–71, esp. 164). It is likely that it was included in a lost epic, for instance in the *Naupactica* attributed to Carcinus of Naupactus (6th century?), which dealt with the expedition of the Argonauts (cf. Pearson (1917) on Soph., *Athamas*). The journey on the ram is also depicted on the Metopes of the Sikyonian treasury at Delphi (dated to the 2nd quarter of the 6th century: see P. de la Coste-Messelière, *Au Musée de Delphes* (Paris: 1936) 168–76.

Thessaly of Laphystian Zeus, the ram being sent as a last-minute substitute for the human victim.[29] Later, when the myth was incorporated into the Argonautic saga, the story evolved of the journey of Phrixus on the Golden Ram and of his sacrifice of the animal in Colchis, thus providing the famous Golden Fleece. Whether or not Phrixus' plight was originally attributed to the machinations of a stepmother, however, is unclear. According to the Scholiast on Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.288, Pherecydes had Phrixus volunteer for sacrifice after the crops had failed of their own accord: it has been suggested that this is the original version of the myth, the story of the stepmother's plot being a later addition to provide a more interesting reason for the crop failure. Certainly there is no trace of such a story before the fifth century. The fragments of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (68ff.) show only that Phrixus was given the ram by his mother Nephele. Though Ino is mentioned, it is in connection with a different and originally unrelated myth involving Ino's suicide and subsequent transformation into the sea-goddess Leucothoe.[30] An allusion to Themisto's grandchildren, immediately following the reference to Ino's death, suggests that Themisto was portrayed here as Athamas' second wife and Ino the third.[31] At *Pyth.* 4.163 (288), Pindar alludes to an unnamed stepmother as the cause of Phrixus' flight; it is probable, however, that he has in mind a quite different story which does not involve Ino (see discussion below). On the two occasions in Pindar where Ino is mentioned, it is with reference to the Leucothoe myth.[32] The first definite literary reference to Ino's stepmotherly machinations against Phrixus is, in fact, in Herodotus, though here Ino and Athamas are said to have engaged in a plot jointly. The familiar story, in which Ino alone causes the failure of the crops and bribes the messenger to bring back a reply from Delphi demanding the

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[29] Preller (1894) 41ff., cf. *RE* 8. 160ff., W.Burkert, *Homo Necans* tr. P. Bing (Berkeley/L.A./London: 1983) 114f. and n. 27. Cf. Abraham and Isaac, Iphigenia. Herodotus (7.197) sees the myth as an aetion for the custom in Halus, Thessaly, whereby the eldest son of a family tracing its descent from Phrixus was sacrificed, if he entered the town hall, to Zeus Laphystius.

[30] In revenge for Ino's nursing of the infant Dionysus, Hera drives Ino's husband Athamas to madness; after killing their son Learchus the king pursues his wife, who, with her other child Melicertes, jumps from a cliff into the sea and is transformed into the sea-goddess Leucothoe. The story is found also in Homer, *Od.* 5.333ff.

[31] So West (1985) 66. If Themisto was the second wife, she would have been the stepmother of Nephele's son Phrixus. But whether or not she played the rôle later assumed by Ino is unclear: see further below.

[32] *Ol.* 2.30., *Pyth.* 11.2.

sacrifice of Phrixus and Helle, was treated in Euripides' two *Phrixus* plays, the first of which may have been written in the decade after the publication of Herodotus' history.[33]

Iconographical evidence for the Ino story goes back only a little earlier—to 440BC at the earliest. An amphora in Naples, dated 440–430, depicts Phrixus, on his ram, being pursued by an axe-wielding female.[34] The woman in question is often identified as Ino, though there is no independent evidence that she ever pursued Phrixus in this way. On the other hand, if the woman is a Maenad,[35] this would fit well with the version of the story used by Euripides in his second *Phrixus* play, according to which Dionysus drove Phrixus and Helle mad; while they were wandering in the forest, on the point of being attacked by Maenads, the Golden Ram was sent by their mother Nephele to rescue them. Since the attack by the Maenads is connected, in all versions, with Ino, and in view of the ancient connection of Ino with Dionysus, the vase provides evidence for the Ino story before it was used by Euripides, regardless of whether the woman on the vase is identified as Ino or as a Maenad.

Although there is no clear evidence for the Ino story prior to the second half of the fifth century, it is nevertheless possible that Phrixus was provided with a stepmother, but of a different kind, at an earlier date. At Pythian 4.163 (288), dated to 461, Pindar speaks of Phrixus being saved ἐκ. . . . ματρυιᾶς ἀθέων βελέων "from the unholy darts of his stepmother". The fact that the poet merely alludes to the story without elaboration indicates that it was a familiar element in the myth. At first glance, Pindar's words appear to be a straight-forward allusion to the Ino story as familiar from later sources. The Scholiast, however, tells us that the expression ἀθέων βελέων refers to the plots and slander of an 'amorous stepmother' whose advances were rejected by Phrixus. The name of this stepmother, according to the Scholiast, varied considerably: Pindar in his *Hymns* called her

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[33] So Webster (1967) 117. See Appendix 1 for the story in Tragedy.

[34] J.D. Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase-Painters* (2nd ed., Oxford: 1963) 1161,1. It is used as an illustration in Roscher s.v. Phrixos 2467 fig. 8. For a picture, see Jacobsthal (1931) 187 Abb.62, John Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Classical Period* (London: 1989) Pl. 205, *LIMC* V 2 Ino fig.13.

[35] As Webster suggested; though Maenads do not normally wield axes, a good parallel is provided by a vase (now lost) from the school of the Berlin painter (first half of 5th century) showing the death of Orpheus, where he is attacked by Maenads with a variety of weapons including an axe (J.D. Beazley, *Attic Red-figured vases in American Museums* (Cambridge: 1918) 39; for a picture see Eduard Gerhard, *Auserlesene griechische Vasenbilder* (Berlin: 1947) vol. 3 pl. 156).

Demodice; elsewhere she appeared as Themisto (Pherecydes), Nephele (Sophocles, *Athamas*) and Gorgopis (Hippias). There is no other evidence for this story, apart from a tale recorded in [Hyg.], *Astr.* 2.20 of a 'Potiphar's wife' situation featuring Phrixus and Demodice, in this case said to be the wife of Athamas' brother Cretheus.[36] If the Scholiast is correct in his interpretation of Pindar,[37] then it appears that a story involving an amorous stepmother was current in the 5th century alongside the better known tale of Ino causing the crops to fail and Phrixus to be sacrificed.

It is even possible that this story goes back to the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, though I make this suggestion tentatively in view of the problematical nature of the evidence. When recording that Pherecydes called the stepmother Themisto, the Pindar Scholiast adds the information that Pherecydes made the crops fail of their own accord and Phrixus voluntarily offer himself for sacrifice. This comment has been taken as a further example of the Scholiast's unreliability, on the grounds that the failure of the crops from natural causes is inconsistent with the presence of a stepmother. Now it certainly does not fit with the story of Ino's plot, but it *could* be part of an 'amorous stepmother' tale, which is, after all, the subject of the Scholiast's discussion. The following is a possible scenario: the crops failed of their own accord, Phrixus offered himself for sacrifice, and his father's initial decision to refuse the offer was reversed after the false accusation of the stepmother, who, having been rejected by Phrixus, exploited the situation to obtain her revenge. If this story, or something like it, was referred to in the Hesiodic Catalogue, this would tie in with the probability that in that poem Themisto (Pherecydes' name for the amorous stepmother) was depicted as the second wife of Athamas and thus the stepmother of Nephele's son.[38]

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[36] She falsely accused Phrixus to her husband and he in turn persuaded Athamas to punish his son; Nephele intervened and sent the ram to rescue Phrixus, along with Helle.

[37] His remarks must be treated with caution: for instance, his statement that Sophocles named the stepmother Nephele is suspect, since Nephele is usually the mother of Phrixus. For the argument that Pindar is referring to an 'amorous stepmother' story, see A.C. Pearson, "Phrixus and Demodice", *CR* 23 (1909), 255–7.

[38] It would not be surprising if a stepmother was present in the Phrixus story from the time it was included in the Argonautic saga: the story (involving an escape on a magic animal) has obvious affinities with the folktale, and when a folktale hero flees from home he is typically escaping a persecutor, who is often a wicked stepmother. Second, the fact that the ram is provided by his mother might suggest the presence of a stepmother: often in folktales involving a stepmother there is a dead

To summarise: the story of Phrixus' escape from sacrifice, in its original form an aetion for rites in Thessaly, was incorporated into the Argonautic saga, at least by the 8th century. There is no clear evidence that Phrixus' flight was attributed to the plotting of a stepmother before the 5th century, though the allusiveness of the reference to a stepmother in Pindar's 4th Pythian indicates that the story was well-known to the reader. It is likely that the stepmother referred to by Pindar was an amorous one, and even possible that the story goes back to the Hesiodic Catalogue, though the fact that evidence for the story depends on the remarks of an unreliable Scholiast renders all conjecture problematical. At any rate, in the second half of the fifth century the story of Ino's plot against Phrixus and Helle became popular: there is no evidence for it before this time. As for Ino herself, there were two originally separate strands of legend: the Leucothoe story, known as early as Homer, and the stories concerning Ino as one of several wives of Athamas, one of which[39]—her machinations against Phrixus becoming so famous, especially after Euripides' treatment of it, that Ino—at least after the 5th century—is not only the canonical stepmother of Phrixus but also the most notorious of all wicked stepmothers in Greek myth.

(v) *Phronime*

The story of Phronime, related by Herodotus in connection with the Cyrenean founder Battus, may have been developed before the 5th century, in oral if not in written tradition. All that can be said for certain about the date of this legend is that it was developed at some stage in the two centuries between the foundation of the colony of Cyrene from Thera in 631 and the time it was recorded by Herodotus. Since, however, the story is presented as an alternative Cyrenean version to the Theran account of the city's foundation (in which Phronime plays no part and Battus is a Theran) and since the introduction of the Cretan princess Phronime allows Cretan descent to be claimed for Battus, it is possible that the legend was invented by

mother who helps the hero(ine) by sending a helper in the form of an animal. Third, in the Hesiodic account Athamas has acquired all his three wives, and thus the necessary scenario for stepmotherly jealousies. It is also possible that Themisto was the stepmother in the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, but that she performed the rôle, not of an amorous stepmother, but of a malevolent one—in other words, the story later told about Ino was already present in this poem, but in connection with Themisto.

[39] The other is the story of Themisto as stepmother of Ino's children.

Cyreneans of Cretan ancestry who wished to forge a link between their motherland and the city founder. According to Herodotus, a large wave of immigrants from Crete arrived in Cyrene during the reign of Battus 2 (c. 580–570). It is feasible that as some of these new settlers established themselves they attempted to increase their prestige by promoting a myth which connected them by blood to the founder of the city.[40]

(vi) *Amorous stepmothers*

For stepmothers in this category, there is some evidence prior to the 5th century, though this is not without difficulties. Apart from Demodice, the stepmother of Phrixus, whose case, as we have seen, is problematical, the myth of Phaedra's love for Hippolytus was developed by the 6th century at the latest.[41] It seems to have originated in Troezen, from where it was taken over by writers of Athenian epic in the 6th century and thence employed in the next century by the Attic Tragedians.[42] In discussing the background to the myth, Barrett (p. 6) compared the 'Potiphar's wife' story, and in Euripides' extant version, at least, Phaedra could just as well be, like Potiphar's wife, a married woman in love with a young man not related to her.[43] Although her position as Hippolytus' stepmother certainly adds an extra dimension to the drama, in that a son is being urged to an action which would involve disloyalty to his own father, his reaction to events, nevertheless, would not have been substantially different had Phaedra not been his stepmother. It is, indeed, remarkable that on no occasion throughout the play is Phaedra alluded to as the μητρυιά of Hippolytus.[44] Moreover, in the few places where the immorality of Phaedra's passion is remarked upon, the language used could apply equally well to adultery with a stranger as to a relationship between stepmother and stepson. At 652

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[40] For discussions, cf. Francois Chamoux, *Cyrène sous la monarchie des Battiades* (Paris: 1953) 95, who dismisses the detail of Phronime being Cretan as unimportant, Claude Calame, "Mythe, récit épique et histoire: le récit hérodotéen de la fondation de Cyrène" in *Métamorphoses du mythe en Grèce antique*, ed. C. Calame (Genève: 1988) 105–125, esp. 113.

[41] Although the name of Phaedra is listed among the female ghosts in *Odyssey* 11.321, no further details of her story are there given.

[42] See Barrett (1964) 6–10.

[43] On the parallelism in Euripides between Hippolytus/Phaedra and the 'Potiphar's wife' characters Bellerophon/Stheneboea, see Papamichael (1983), 45, 62f.

[44] Contrast here Seneca's *Phaedra* (to be discussed later) where the word *noverca* occurs frequently.

Hippolytus talks of his father's λέκτρων ἀθίκτων "inviolable bed", at 764f. the chorus refer to οὐχ ὁσίων ἐρώτων "of unhallowed passion", at 885 Theseus says Hippolytus dared to attempt an assault on his wife, affronting the august eye of Zeus, and at 946 he feels that the very sight of Hippolytus invoved him in μίασμα "pollution".[45]

An interesting question, then, is whether the original myth was in essence merely a variant of the 'Potiphar's wife' tale, and if so, at what stage Phaedra's rôle as stepmother began to be stressed. It is significant that in the Roman treatments of the myth, in contrast to Euripides' extant *Hippolytus*, the fact that Phaedra was Hippolytus' stepmother receives heavy emphasis. Although there is some evidence that this emphasis may go back to the first *Hippolytus* of Euripides, the question cannot, however, be decided.[46]

2. *Stepmothers of the 5th Century*

Many stepmother stories are unknown before the fifth century. Several of these first appear in plays by Sophocles and Euripides, and may be Tragic creations. The *Tyro* of Sophocles contained the first known treatment of Sidero's cruelty to her stepdaughter Tyro, while the story of Penelope's plotting against Euryalus occurs for the first time in Sophocles' *Euryalos*.[47] Similarly, the blinding of the Phineadae as a result of their stepmother's accusation seems to be an innovation of Sophocles.[48] Stepmothers who make their first appearance in extant literature in plays of Euripides are Creusa, whose attempt to poison her supposed stepson Ion is found for the first time in the *Ion*,[49] Themisto, whose attack on the children of Ino formed the plot of the *Ino*, and (possibly) the 'amorous' Philonome, whose false

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[45] For μίασμα applied to adultery cf. Parker (1983) 95 and n. 84.

[46] For fuller discussion of the question, see Excursus to this appendix.

[47] Gruppe (1921) 625 argued that the story of Penelope and Euryalos belongs to a stratum of Thesprotian and Epirote legend which was older than the Ionian epos, but this is no doubt due to a reluctance to admit that the tragedians could invent anything. Marie-Madeleine Mactoux, *Pénélope: légende et mythe* (Paris: 1975) 53, on the other hand, credited Sophocles with the invention of the Penelope/ Euryalos myth.

[48] See Bouvier and Moreau (1983), 5.

[49] It is possible that Sophocles also treated the theme in his *Creusa*: see Grégoire (1923), Conacher (1967) 271 and n. 12, Burnett (1971) 103 n.4. On the other hand, both the content and the date of Sophocles' play are uncertain: Imhof (1966) 61 n. 24, following Wilamowitz (1926) 1,11 and Owen (1939) xii–xiii, argues in favour of the story as a Euripidean invention.

accusation against her stepson Tennes provided the subject for the *Tennes*.[50] The conflict between Andromache and Hermione is probably a Euripidean invention.[51] Finally, the wicked foster-mother, Siris, appeared first in the *Melanippe Desmotis*, while Dirce's stepmotherly treatment of Antiope was first treated, as far as we know, in Euripides' *Antiope*. It is likely to have been Euripides who introduced the motif of the blinding of Phoenix into this myth; the version of the story in which the concubine Phthia falsely accuses her 'stepson' of rape was apparently developed in Attic tragedy, where the Phoenix story was a popular theme.[52]

It is widely held that the tragedians always make use of a pre-existing mythological tradition, changing character and motivation and some of the unessential details, but neither adding anything to the basic myth as they found it, nor inventing myths out of nothing.[53] Even granted the truth of this hypothesis it is not, however, necessary to posit that every stepmother unknown to us before Attic Tragedy must have been taken over from some lost epic.[54] These stepmothers may, rather, be viewed as additions by the tragedians to an already established myth, providing a new motivation for an existing mythical event, or a fresh insight into character.

Two factors argue in favour of this view. First, several of the stories in which stepmothers appear for the first time in the 5th century or later are found in earlier poetry, with the stepmother's rôle either missing or played by another character. Thus, the punishment of Phoenix (in the form of exile, rather than blinding) is found in Homer, but there it is the fault of his mother rather than his father's concubine; the famine that led to Phrixus' being chosen for sacrifice may

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[50] On the authorship of the *Tennes* play see Appendix 1. Jouan (1966) 307f. suggested that the theme might have come from local folklore or a literary foundation legend of the 6th or 5th century.

[51] Cf. Stevens (1971) 5, Elaine Fantham, "Andromache's Child in Euripides and Seneca", in *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays Presented to D.J. Conacher*, ed. M. Cropp, E. Fantham and S.E. Scully (Calgary 1986) 268.

[52] There were tragedies called *Phoinix* by Euripides, Sophocles, Ion, Astydamas and ?]nedorus as well as by Ennius (H.D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* (Cambridge: 1967) 389).

[53] Cf., for instance, Conacher (1959), 24 = (1967) 271 "the more typical Euripidean adaptions of myth usually involved changes in emphasis to suit his theme or the interweaving of different mythical traditions... or the development of little known local legends by attaching them to myths already well established in the literary tradition."

[54] Gruppe's hypothesis about the *Euryalus* (cf. note 47) is an example of this approach.

not have been caused by a stepmother originally, or else an amorous stepmother might have been involved: in any case the particular story relating to Ino and the roasting of the seeds seems to date from the 5th century; Tyro appears in the *Odyssey* (11.235) as the mother of illegitimate twins, but this takes place after her marriage, a circumstance which precludes the cruelty of a stepmother in this version. Originally, Phineus was a blind seer whose loss of sight was attributed to various causes, e.g. he was blinded for showing Phrixus the way (Hes. fr. 254 Merk.-West): it is in the later versions which became current in the 5th century that the stepmother element is introduced into the myth, Phineus' blinding being a doublet of, and a punishment for, his blinding of his own sons.[55] Though Hera's ill-treatment of Heracles is early, the stepmother element, is as we have argued, a later reinterpretation of events. Neoptolemus' marriage to Hermione is alluded to in the *Odyssey* (4.4ff.) and his taking of Andromache as concubine in the *Little Iliad* (*Ilias Parva*, *EGF* fr. 20) though the dispute between the women and the stepmotherly rôle played by Hermione are not found before Euripides and may therefore represent his own insight into the way women placed in such a situation would have felt and behaved.[56]

In the second place, most of the characters who play a part in stepmother stories known only from the fifth century or later, including some of the stepmothers themselves, already exist in the mythological tradition, but not in the context of a stepmother tale: in the Homeric poems are found Andromache (*Iliad*, *passim*), Theseus (*Iliad* 1.265, *Od.* 11.322,631), Oedipus (*Iliad* 23.679, *Od.* 11.271), Ino as Leucothoe (*Od.* 5.333ff.), Penelope (*Odyssey*, *passim*), Hermione (*Od.* 4.1–14), Phaedra[57] and Antiope;[58] Athamas and his three wives and various children are familiar from the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, where Xuthus and Creusa were also referred to as the parents of Ion;[59] Medea is first mentioned in the *Theogony* (961).

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[55] Cf. Bouvier and Moreau (1983), who point out that the myth of the blinding of the Phineadae in its various versions demonstrates the problems caused by a second marriage—this fits in with the idea that the stepfamily relationships were of special concern in the 5th century but not before.

[56] Cf. Stevens (1971) 5. Cf. Pausanias' story of the killing of Phocus by Peleus and Telamon at the instigation of his stepmother.

[57] Though the line in which Phaedra is mentioned (*Od.* 11.321ff.), which also contains the name of the Athenian Procris, might be an Athenian interpolation of the 6th century: Gantz (1993) 286.

[58] Od. 11.260–5, Hes. fr. 181 (see West (1985) 98 and n. 151).

EXCURSUS: WAS PHAEDRA PORTRAYED AS STEPMOTHERLY IN THE FIRST *HIPPOLYTUS* OF EURIPIDES?

A. *Arguments in favour*

(1) There is no doubt that in Euripides' play Phaedra was depicted as a wicked woman; it would not, therefore, have been inappropriate to stress her position as the stepmother of Hippolytus.[60]

(2) According to Asclepiades of Tragilos,[61] when Theseus married Phaedra he sent his son Hippolytus to be brought up elsewhere because he feared stepmotherly behaviour on the part of his new wife (i.e. the usual cruelty to a child by the stepmother). Is this merely speculation on the part of Asclepiades, or has he derived the idea from something in the earlier tradition, perhaps from the first *Hippolytus*?

(3) There is some evidence that Phaedra may have resorted to aphrodisiac magic in the first *Hippolytus*. In view of the fact that the offering of potions (whether deadly or erotic) to stepsons is typical stepmotherly behaviour, this element would make Phaedra closer to a wicked stepmother than to a 'Potiphar's wife'. There are three main pieces of testimony:

i) the remark by the Scholiast on Theocritus, 2.10 that women in love call on the moon and that Phaedra did this in the first *Hippolytus*. In view of the close association of the moon with magic, this might suggest that Phaedra used magic in the play.[62]

ii) the nurse's suggestion in the extant *Hippolytus* (509ff.) that Phaedra use φίλτρα ('love-charms'), might be a relic of a scene in the first *Hippolytus* in which Phaedra actually prepared a magic love potion for Hippolytus.[63]

iii) the tradition, known only from Prop., 2.1.51, that Phaedra administered a love potion to Hippolytus. It is possible that the story derives from the First *Hippolytus*.[64]

B. *Arguments against*

(1) There is no evidence that a relationship between stepmother and stepson was regarded as incestuous in the 5th century. No legal bar seems to have existed to a marriage contracted between a son and his stepmother after the father's death; in fact the *Telegonia*, a Cyclic Epic of the 6th century, contained a story that Penelope married Odysseus' son by Circe, Telegonus, after her husband's death, and that Telemachus married Circe.

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[59] See frg. 10 (a) 20–23 Merk.-West.

[60] The possible connection of the play with the Senecan *Phaedra* cannot be taken as evidence: even if Seneca did follow Euripides closely, the *noverca* element may be his own addition, under the influence of the *declamatio*.

[61] *FGrH* 12 F 28 (4th century BC).

[62] For a contrary view, Barrett (1964) 35.

[63] For fuller discussion of this point, see Watson (1993).

[64] Cf. Watson (1993). Zwierlein (1987) argued that the Propertian reference is to poison, rather than to a love potion, and that the theme was treated in Sophocles' *Phaedra* (contra, Griffin 1990 130 n. 6).

In Euripides' extant play, one of the reasons Hippolytus suggests (and then rejects) for his showing an interest in Phaedra is that he could thereby gain Theseus' kingdom, which might be taken to imply that he could have ambitions of disposing of Theseus and marrying his widow (1009–11): the remark would make no sense if such a marriage was illegal. If, as seems likely, it was acceptable for a stepson to marry his widowed stepmother, an affair between them when the husband was still alive would not have carried incestuous implications.[65] Granted, then, that a sexual relationship between stepmother and stepson was not at that period considered incest, the sin contemplated by Phaedra would be technically no different from adultery.

(2) If, as March argues,[66] Euripides treated Phaedra in the first *Hippolytus* with sympathy, albeit as a shameless woman, then it may not have been appropriate to stress her rôle as a stepmother.

[65] See Ghiron-Bistagne, (1982), 43f. for the argument that the relationship was not incestuous, though it may have been considered so in Hellenistic times.
[66] March (1990).

APPENDIX THREE

THE STEPMOTHER IN THE FOLKTALE

A prominent character in folktales the world over,[1] the stepmother is by far the most common of all the cruel relatives who persecute the hero or heroine (these include elder sisters or brothers, stepsisters, mothers-in-law, and mothers).[2] The collection by the brothers Grimm of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, for example, contains at least thirteen stories featuring cruel treatment of stepchildren on the part of a stepmother, including some of the best known tales: *Snow White*, *Aschenputtel* ('Cinderella'), *The Juniper Tree*, and *Hansel and Gretel*.[3] Stepfathers are rarely encountered in this rôle, though it should be noted that adversaries within the family are mainly female.[4]

Stepmothers are almost invariably[5] depicted as wicked, the stepchild as their completely innocent victim. This may be explained in

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[1] See Thompson, (1957) S 31 and bibliography quoted there. Norma O. Ireland, *Index to Fairy Tales, 1949–1972 including Folklore, Legends and Myths, In collections*, Massachusetts: 1973) 618f., lists 92 stories under the heading 'Stepmothers'. Under 'stepfathers', only one story is listed. On folklore in general see Holbek (1987). For a specific example of the geographically widespread nature of tales involving stepmothers see for instance Anna B. Rooth, *The Cinderella Cycle*, (Lund: 1951): there are 5 variants of the tale, all except one sub-variant containing the stepmother; these are spread all over Europe as well as the Middle and Far East.

[2] Thompson (1977) 116. In 12th century Icelandic literature (not only folktales) the theme is so common that there is a special term ('Stjúpmaeðrasaga') to denote a narrative dealing with a stepmother's wickedness to her stepchildren and the ensuing narrative events. See E. O. Sveinsson, *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (Reykjavik: 1940) 214ff., cited by Laurits Bødker, "Folk Literature, Germanic" (in vol. 2 of *International Dictionary of Regional European Ethnology and Folklore*, 1965).

[3] For these tales I have used *Grimm's Tales for Young and Old* tr. by R. Manheim (1978).

[4] Thompson (1977) 116–7 and see (1957) S 'cruel relatives'. I shall return to this point below.

[5] I have discovered only one exception, in an Icelandic saga of the 13th or 14th century, where a stepmother mourns the death of her stepson rather than her own son (Inger M.Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Copenhagen: 1966) 213). Cf. also the Icelandic folktale *Hilde the good stepmother* (recounted in Bødker, Hole and D'Aronco (1963) 56ff.). In this case, however, there is a special reason why the stepmother is not portrayed as malevolent: the stepmother, who befriends and helps her future stepdaughter in the course of a three-year engagement to the father, is a carbon copy of her stepdaughter. Obviously in this case she represents a substitute for the daughter onto whom are projected the daughter's Electral feelings for the father.

terms of both the one-dimensional[6] character of the folktale, and the fact that folktales are invariably presented from the point of view of the younger generation. In 'feminine'[7] stories, such as *Cinderella* or *Snow White*, the moral innocence of the stepdaughter is often given physical manifestation in the fact that she is very beautiful. The contrast between innocent stepdaughter and wicked stepmother is not necessarily underscored by making the stepmother physically ugly;[8] on the other hand, in cases where the stepmother has a daughter or daughters of her own, these are often characterised as both ugly and wicked, in order to distinguish them from the heroine.[9]

The stepmother's maliciousness may take a variety of forms. Sometimes it consists of beating the stepchildren or failing to feed them properly.[10] Often, she sets the hero or heroine unpleasant[11] or impossible tasks, such as gathering strawberries in winter.[12] In stories of the *Cinderella* type, the banishment of the stepdaughter to the kitchen to deal with menial tasks is contrasted with the favoured treatment of the real daughters. Very common in folktales is the theme of the hero who leaves home and travels the world where he meets various adventures. Sometimes his journey is undertaken to escape the persecution of a stepmother. An early example of this occurs in the Egyptian tale *The Doomed Prince*, dated to the reign of Ramses 2 (13th century BC).[13] Here the prince, travelling incognito, uses the story that he has left home to escape his wicked stepmother in order to explain his presence in a foreign land. Other stepmothers employ more indirect means to harm their stepchildren. In a Scottish version of the common 'Maiden Without Hands' theme, the stepmother

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[6] Cf. Lüthi (1982) esp. ch 1 pp. 4ff; also Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* transl. A.Y. Martin and R.P. Martin et al, (Manchester: 1984) 28–9.

[7] I.e. where the central character is a heroine rather than a hero.

[8] Sometimes she is, for instance in Grimm's story *The Riddle* (no 22) the stepmother/witch is described as an old woman with red eyes. The stepmother, however, may be physically beautiful though morally corrupt [e.g. Grimm nos. 49, 53 (*Snow White*)].

[9] E.g. many versions of the Cinderella story; *The Black Bride and the White Bride* (Italian; in Bødker, Hole and D'Aronco). An exception is Grimm's version of the Cinderella story, *Ashputtle* (no. 21) where the stepsisters have white faces but black hearts: on the other hand, though attractive, they are still inferior to their stepsister, at least when she is dressed up for the ball.

[10] E.g. Grimm 11, and stories of the 'Hansel and Gretel' type.

[11] E.g. Grimm 21, 24.

[12] Grimm 13, cf. 186.

[13] Translated in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley:. 1976) vol. 2, 200–203.

uses the device of the false accusation to get her husband to mutilate his daughter.[14]

Stepmothers not only mistreat, but also murder, or attempt to murder, their stepchildren. Again, a variety of means is employed. The child may be sent away with a servant who has instructions to kill her (as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*),[15] or may simply be abandoned in the woods to perish (e.g. *Hansel and Gretel*). In a British version of the Cinderella story (*Ashpitel*) the stepmother tries to starve the girl to death. Another British tale, *The Rose Tree*, tells of a stepmother who kills her stepdaughter and serves the girl up in a pie.[16] The stepmother in Grimm's *Darling Roland* attacks the sleeping child with an axe, but cuts off the head of her own daughter by mistake.

Very frequently the stepmother is a witch.[17] She uses her witchcraft either to destroy the stepchildren (in the story of *Snow White*, for instance, the witch/stepmother gives her stepdaughter a poisoned comb and, when that fails, a poisoned apple) or else, very often, she changes them into an animal of some kind. A striking example is the story from Northumbria entitled *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs* in which the stepmother transforms her stepdaughter into a giant worm.[18] In an Irish folktale the children are turned into wolves.[19] Three of Grimm's stepmothers change their stepchildren into animals out of spite, in one case with intent to kill (the stepchild is turned into a lamb, which the stepmother gives orders should be killed for dinner).[20] Icelandic literature, in which, as we saw, stepmothers are especially prominent, contains many examples of the witch-stepmother: these occur in folktales[21] and are also frequently encountered in the romances of the 13th to 16th century (lygisögur).[22] Often, the stepmother acts merely out of malice; in other cases, the theme is linked to that of the amorous stepmother. For instance, in

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[14] *The Cruel Stepmother* (recounted in Briggs (1970). She kills her own baby son and puts his body in the sleeping stepdaughter's arms: the father punishes the daughter by cutting off her hands. The story is widespread over Europe, the Americas and Africa: see Heinrich Däumling, *Studie über den Typus des Mädchens ohne Hände* (Munich: 1912).

[15] Grimm 53.

[16] For these two see Briggs (1970).

[17] Thompson (1957) G205; also Aarne/Thompson, nos. 403 and 450.

[18] Recounted in Briggs (1970).

[19] K. Müller-Lisowski, *Irische Volksmärchen* (Jena: 1923) no. 2.

[20] No. 141; other tales where stepchildren are bewitched include 11 and 49.

[21] Schlauch (1934),101.

[22] Schlauch (1934), quoting 8 examples.

the lygisögur 'Hrólfs saga Kraka', the hero Björn Hringr is turned into a bear by his Finnish[23] stepmother after he rejects her amorous advances, while in other cases the stepmother puts a curse on a stepson who has similarly rejected her.[24]

Often the stepmother's mistreatment of her stepchildren is presented as simple unmotivated malice (this applies especially where the stepchild is a male, as in some male versions of the Cinderella theme, or in cases where the hero has to leave home to escape the ill-treatment of his stepmother). Such tales are presumably based on the assumption that it is as natural for a stepmother to hate her stepchildren as to love her own children. The idea is made explicit in the opening of one of the Grimm Märchen (no. 56 *Darling Roland*): "there was once a woman who was a genuine witch and she had two daughters, an ugly, wicked one, whom she loved because she was her own, and a beautiful, good one, whom she hated because she was her stepdaughter".

The major driving force behind the stepmother of folktale (apart from a general malice derived from her rôle as stepmother) is jealousy. This may take a number of forms. She may envy the heroine/stepdaughter's beauty which surpasses her own,[25] or more frequently, she may feel envy on behalf of her own children (usually daughters) whose ugliness, both mental and physical, stands in sharp contrast to the beauty of the stepdaughter:[26] the jealousy is exacerbated when the prince or king prefers the stepdaughter as a bride.[27] In the tale of *Hansel and Gretel*, the stepmother's suggestion to the children's father that he abandon them in the forest is ostensibly motivated by circumstances. The family is so poor that in time of famine there is not enough food to go around: the worried father consults his wife, who suggests that it is better to send the children away so that at least the adults can survive, rather than risk all four perishing of hunger. Clearly she is merely seizing the excuse of practical necessity to rid herself of stepchildren whose presence she resents.

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[23] The Finns were known for their magic skills.

[24] Schlauch (1934), 99–100.

[25] E.g. in *Snow White*: this is the surface meaning, though a Freudian such as Bettelheim (1976), for whom the tale is essentially concerned with the daughter's Electra complex, would view the jealousy of the stepmother as arising from rivalry between the mother and the daughter for the affection of the father.

[26] E.g. Grimm nos. 11, 13, 56.

[27] E.g. Grimm nos. 11, 13, 135.

The jealous desire on the part of the stepmother to obtain the inheritance for her own son—in myths, as we have seen, the most common motivation of stepmothers—is not commonly found in folktales.[28] An exception is Grimm's story *The Juniper Tree* (47), in which the stepmother kills the stepson so that her own daughter can inherit all the father's wealth: notice that here the stepmother's child is a girl.[29] Moreover, whereas in myths the stepmother's own sons are sometimes her accomplices (and occasionally are solely responsible for their half-brother's death, as in the usual version of the murder of Phocus by Peleus and Telamon), in *The Juniper Tree*, by contrast, the daughter is tricked into this rôle;[30] in fact, she is responsible for the ultimate punishment of the stepmother and the restoration of her half-brother. Conflicts between half-siblings over inheritance do not, in fact, play any rôle in folktales.[31] Likewise, although the theme of the long lost son who returns home to secure his inheritance is common in folktales, the False Hero whose claim he defeats is a brother or someone else but not a step or half-brother, nor is he hindered by a stepmother at the time of the recognition of his identity (as, for instance, is Theseus in Euripides' *Aegeus*).

As we have seen, Greek myths on the subject of amorous stepmothers are akin to the 'Potiphar's wife' tale, one of the essential ingredients of which is the false accusation on the part of the wife after a failed seduction attempt. This motif is common in folktales.[32] In some cases the wife who accuses the young man is his stepmother.[33]

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[28] It is present in the Indian epic the *Ramayana* (dated to 750–500BC (?), a poem recognised as containing folk-tale *motifs* (see Robert P. Goldman, *The Ramayana of Valmiki* (Princeton: 1984) Vol. I p. 41), where the wicked Kaikeyi plots to have her husband's eldest and best-loved son, her stepson Rama, disinherited in favour of her own child. But in this context it is perhaps better regarded as a mythical/epic rather than a folktale theme.

[29] This would not be possible of course in the social context behind the Greek myths, where a female could not inherit the throne.

[30] After causing the stepson's head to be cut off, the stepmother sticks it back on and instructs the daughter to hit her half-brother if he won't answer her; the daughter does so and when the head falls off she thinks she has caused her brother's death, so that when the stepmother disposes of the body by serving it up in a stew, the daughter is compelled to keep the secret.

[31] Such conflicts are normally between full brothers, and no stepmother is present. In the case of disputes between stepsisters, e.g. Cinderella, inheritance from the father is not the issue.

[32] On Potiphar's wife as type of folktale, see Thompson (1977), 275–6.

[33] Amorous stepmothers are very popular in lygisögur: see Schlauch (1934) 99. She compares other literatures e.g. a Sanskrit tale and an Irish story. See also Thompson (1957) T418.

The earliest known treatment of the theme, which may have been the source of the biblical tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (*Genesis* 39), is contained in the Egyptian folktale *The Story of Two Brothers*. The tale was written down about 1225BC but may belong to a much earlier oral tradition.[34] Although it concerns a wife who attempts to seduce her brother-in-law, the husband has acted as a father to this younger brother and he lives with them, so that he is a tantamount to the woman's stepson. After the false accusation, the older brother attempts to kill the younger, but is prevented by Ra. The younger brother flees, while the elder, on learning the truth, kills his wife.[35]

It remains to mention two further characteristics of the stepmother in folktales, both of which seem to me to be a product of the folktale genre. First, the stepmother is always anonymous. This results from the fact that, in the typical folktale, the story is always told from the viewpoint of the young hero or heroine. As the centre of interest, these characters are often given names, though these are either of a general kind[36] such as Hans, Else, Gretel and Jack, or else they describe the hero or heroine's circumstances (e.g. Thumbling, Snow White, Aschenputtel). Older people, when they play any part in the tale, are normally[37] only important in their relation to the hero, as parents, helpers (e.g. the fairy godmother or the child's own dead mother in the guise of an animal or the old dwarf) or foes: the ogre, the witch, the stepmother. As such there seems no reason to give them a name.[38]

Secondly, the stepmother never achieves her desires. Even if she succeeds in killing or bewitching her stepchildren, they are always

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[34] *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962) s.v. Joseph; the Egyptian story is included in James B. Pritchard's *Ancient near eastern texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed. Princeton: 1969) 23–5, also in A. Erman *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* transl. A. M. Blackman (London: 1927) 150–61 and Donald A. Mackenzie *Egyptian Myth and Legend* (London: 1913) 45ff. under the title "The Peasant who became King".

[35] For details of the rest of the story along with a Freudian analysis, see Slater (1968) 276–82.

[36] Since folktales are universal in their themes and settings.

[37] There are also (less common) tales involving husband and wife e.g. Grimm 95 (Old Hildebrand) where the centre of interest is the wife's attempts to cuccold her husband with the village priest (no children of the couple are mentioned): in this case the husband (Hildebrand) is named because he is the 'hero' of the tale.

[38] In the *Ramayana* the stepmother is called Kaikeyi, but though a folktale character, she has been introduced into an epic poem. So in Sophocles' tragedy on Tyro (=Snow White) the stepmother is given a corresponding name, Sidero (The Iron Lady).

miraculously restored to life or to human form respectively.[39] And she herself is often executed in the end, usually in a horrible manner, e.g. being made to dance in heated iron shoes,[40] or being rolled down a hill in a nail-studded barrel.[41] Such a denouement is necessary in terms of the inevitable ending of the folktale in which the hero or heroine must live happily ever after. For this to take place, the stepchild must obviously be alive and the stepmother out of the way.[42] It is also in keeping with the optimistic view of the world adopted by the folktale, where the good always triumph and the evil are always punished. [43]

To summarise. The stepmother of folktale is almost invariably evil. Her most prominent characteristic is jealousy. The 'amorous stepmother' is also common. Stepmothers are frequently associated with witchcraft. The stepmother's designs are always thwarted; she is often punished; by contrast, if the stepchildren are killed or injured they are always eventually restored. The motivation for her malignity, where given, does not normally involve inheritance disputes.

We are now in a position to examine the relationship between folktale and myth in their portrayal of the stepmother. Overall, the stepmother of the folktale bears close resemblances to those stepmothers in the myths we have examined. Some important differences of both characterisation and plot can, however, be isolated: many of these can be accounted for in terms of generic differences between myth and folktale. For instance, stepmothers are often portrayed as witches. In Greek myths, on the other hand, the only

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[39] E.g. *Snow White* (Grimm 53); cf. Grimm 135 (the stepdaughter is turned into a duck which when killed becomes a girl again).

[40] Grimm 53; cf. 56 (dancing to magic tune until dead).

[41] Grimm 13. Other punishments include dropping a millstone on the head (Grimm 47), and burning (Grimm 11). In the 'Laidley Worm' story (referred to above) the stepmother who changed her stepdaughter into a worm is herself changed in the end into a toad. In *The Beautiful Wassilissa*, a Russian version of Cinderella, the stepmother and her daughter are burnt to ashes.

[42] This normally means destruction, though occasionally a stepmother reforms, e.g. in the British tale *The One-Eyed Stepmother*, where the appearance of the real mother's reproachful ghost is enough to achieve this amazing transformation!

[43] The type of punishment might also mirror social reality: in an interesting essay, it is pointed out that in the Grimm's stories where the stepmother is a witch, the punishment is usually burning of some kind—a reflection of burning at the stake as the standard punishment in Medieval Europe for witchcraft. (see Gerhard O.W. Mueller, "The criminological significance of Grimm's fairy tales" in *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*, ed. R. B. Bottigheimer (Philadephia: 1986) 222–3).

mythical witch who also performs the rôle of wicked stepmother is Medea, but the giving of the poisoned cup to Theseus (in contrast to other deeds performed by her, such as the rejuvenation of Peleas) is not necessarily an act of witchcraft (Creusa attempts the same in the case of Ion[44]), nor does Medea use her witchcraft to change her stepson's form, as do the stepmothers of folktale. The distinction between myth and folktale in this respect is readily explainable in terms of generic differences: whereas the element of magic plays a considerable rôle in the folktales, in myth the supernatural is largely the sphere of the gods; magical elements such as Perseus' winged sandals are usually regarded as imported folktale elements.

A second difference between myth and folktale is that in the latter case the stepmother is always nameless.[45] In myth this happens only with the stepmother of Phronime—and it is no coincidence that this story comes closest of all the myths to folktale in other respects as well.[46] It was suggested above that the anonymity of the stepmother in folktale is a product of the genre; likewise the fact that stepmothers in myth are usually assigned a name is due to the fact that myths always relate to a specific genealogical and geographic locale.

Third, as noted above, the stepmother of myth is, like that of folktale, often punished, the stepchildren being rescued at the last minute. On the other hand, in several myths (notably the usual version of the Phaedra legend) the stepchild is not saved from death or mutilation: in folktales, by contrast, where children are killed, mutilated, or changed into an animal, they are invariably restored to life miraculously, while the stepmother is punished. This difference obviously has to do with the prescriptive 'happy ending' of the folktale, which involves both the salvation of the hero(ine) and the destruction of the villain.

Fourth, whereas in myths the stepmother sometimes commits suicide (as in the case of Themisto, for example), such an action would be totally out of keeping with the one-dimensional character of the folktale stepmother. In folktales, rather than committing suicide, the wicked stepmother is normally executed. A possible explanation for

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[44] But note that the link between poison and witchcraft is strong; the *Chorus*, in fact, invoke the aid of the goddess of witches, Hecate, after Creusa's decision to prepare poison for Ion (Eur., *Ion* 1048ff.)

[45] Cf. L. Röhrich, "Märchen und Mythen" in *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: Das Paradigma Roms*, ed. F. Graf (Stuttgart/Leipzig: 1993) 299.

[46] For discussion, see ch. 2 n. 29.

the absence of suicide among folktale stepmothers is that the act implies a display of feeling on the part of the stepmother that is alien to what Luthi[47] terms the abstract, isolating style of the folktale, where characters possess no psychological depth and engage in no emotions extraneous to the central action. Take, for example, the Grimm story *Darling Roland* (no. 56). Like Themisto, the witch-stepmother attempts to murder her sleeping stepchild, but murders her own child by mistake. The ensuing events illustrate well the narrative style that is typical of the folktale: instead of killing herself, the witch, on discovering the truth, leaves her daughter's body lying there without giving it a second thought and dashes out in her seven-league boots in pursuit of her stepdaughter. Her only emotion is one of rage that she has not succeeded in killing her stepdaughter, an emotion that is in keeping with her one-sided character as cruel stepmother. If the stepmother's function in the story is analysed as some sort of symbol of the destructive forces that face the heroine, only those emotions which the stepmother feels in relation to the heroine (e.g. hatred, anger) are relevant to the story: how she is affected by her own daughter's death is unimportant.[48]

Finally, although jealousy is a prominent characteristic of many stepmothers, the type most common in the folktale—that of a stepmother towards her young attractive stepdaughter—is seen in myth only infrequently, most notably in the stories of Phronime and of Sidero and Tyro.

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[47] (1982), esp. chs. 3 and 4 pp. 24ff., 37ff.

[48] Compare also the suicide of Phaedra (myth) with the Egyptian folktale, *The Story of Two Brothers*, where the elder brother on learning the truth kills his wife.

APPENDIX FOUR

ESTABLISHING A LIST OF INSCRIPTIONS[1]

(i) *Tombs set up by or for a stepmother*

Humbert collected 10 inscriptions (5 for a stepmother and 5[2] by a stepmother); with the help of the computer concordance to *CIL* 6,[3] eleven may be added with some degree of certainty[4] and a further four[5] possibly refer to a stepmother.

There are only four cases (all mentioned by Humbert) in which the wording makes it clear beyond dispute that the recipient of the inscription is a stepmother: 2.5008 and 3.8821 (both for a *noverca*), and 2.820 and 6.11816 (both for a woman by her *privignus*). Another may be added if the partly legible name Cantabr... in 6.14367 (set up by a *privigna*) stands for Cantabria. In some inscriptions in which a son sets up a tomb for *pater* 'father' and *coniunx* 'wife' (14.5176: the fifth of Humbert's examples)[6] or *coniunx eius* 'his wife' (6.9108, 6. 22715) it is likely that a stepmother is referred to.[7] Finally, mention should be made of an inscription for *Labiene vitrici cognatae* (6.29679) which Dixon ingeniously suggests may be an attempt to coin a feminine form of *vitricus* to avoid using *noverca*.[8]

Of 16 possible inscriptions set up by stepmothers for a stepson or

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[1] All inscriptions cited in this appendix are from *CIL* unless otherwise stated.

[2] He lists 11, but one (6.10518) appears to be a wrong reference. The others are: (for a stepmother) 2.820, 2.5008., 3.8821., 6.11816., 14.5176; (by a stepmother) 2.871., 6.6713, 6.7527, 6.26211., 9.2095.

[3] =*CIL* 6, part 7 ed. E. Jory and D.G Moore (1974); I have also consulted the *TLL* archives in Munich.

[4] (for a stepmother): 6.9108, 6.22715 (by a stepmother): 6.4566S, 6.5600, 6.11472, 6.15993, 6.23342, 6. 25283.,10.590; *Not. d. scav.* 1923 p. 390,1925 p. 23 n. 3.

[5] 6.14367 (not completely legible), 6. 24043, 6.24805, 6.29679.

[6] See M. Durry, "Le tombeau d'Artémidore" in *Droits de l'Antiquité et sociologie juridique* (Mélanges Henri Lévy-Bruhl) (Paris: 1959) 361–71.

[7] At 6.19846, a man and his *coniunx* ('wife') are given a tomb by their *fili* ('sons'): as he is not designated *pater* ('father') the woman might be their mother; she is less likely to be their stepmother than in the examples where the man is called *pater* but the wife is not referred to as *mater* ('mother'), for in those cases 'coniunx eius' seems to be a periphrasis for *noverca*. (The same goes for 6.25257, set up by a man for for his parents C. Questorius Fortunatus and Junia Saturnia *coniunx eius*).

[8] The other possibilities are that *vitrici cognatae*=relation of his stepfather, or that Victrix is a proper name.

stepdaughter, four are beyond dispute, i.e. the relationship is indicated by the unambiguous term *privignus* (stepson).[9] Cases where the alternative *filiaster/filiastra* is used are more problematical, since the term can be used on occasion to refer to an illegitimate child, that is a child whose parents did not have *conubium* (the right to contract a legal marriage) at the time of his or her birth.[10] For this reason, Humbert did not include, for instance, 6.15993 (by Coesia Musa for her *filiaster* T. Coesius Florus) on the grounds that the coincidence of the gentile name Coesius/a indicates that Florus is the illegitimate son (*filiaster*) of Coesia Musa;[11] similarly he disregards 10.590 (Flavia Chrysis for Anthion her *filiaster*: the boy's name shows that he is of servile status and therefore illegitimate), though he does include, somewhat inconsistently, 6.6713 (by Memmia Flora for her *filiaster* Vitalis).[12] I have argued elsewhere[13] that *filiaster* does not necessarily mean 'illegitimate son' in such cases, and would therefore regard the examples just cited as examples of a steprelationship, and also 6.7527 (mentioned by Humbert), as well as 23342 and *Not. d. scav.* 1925 p.23 n 3. (for a *filiastra*). If the name Caltili . . . Agrippin . . . (6.5600) is feminine, then this is another example of a stepmother erecting a tomb for a *filiastra*. Other cases which probably concern a stepmother are 6.4566S, 11472 and 25283 (all set up by a wife for her husband and *filius/a eius* ('his son/daughter'). At 6. 24805, the inscription is for a daughter, Popilia Felicla, by Rufinia Auxesis and Popilius Fortunatus, her father. The fact that Popilius is designated as *pater*, whereas Rufinia is not called mother, might indicate that she is the stepmother.[14] Finally, 6.24043 is set up by Petronia Nite and Alcibiades

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[9] 2.871 6.26211 9.2095 (all mentioned by Humbert); add also *Not.d. scav.* 1923 p. 390.

[10] Most commonly where one or both were of slave status or where the father was a member of the army. On the meaning of *filiaster*, see Watson (1989), 536–48.

[11] Note that illegitimate children whose mother was freeborn or a freedwoman took her gentile name and were themselves free though illegitimate.

[12] The inconsistency is due to the fact that Humbert is following Ruggiero (1922), iii.88f. s.v. *filius*, who lists 10.590, but not 6.6713, as an example of *filiaster* in the sense 'illegitimate child'.

[13] See above n. 10.

[14] Also the word order of the inscription ("DM/Popiliae Feliclae q.v./an VI M I D XII/Rufinia Auxesis et/Popilius Fortunatus/ pat. f. dul." "to the departed spirit of/Popilia Felicla who lived/6 years one month and 12 days/Rufinia Auxesis and/ Popilius Fortunatus/her father [set this tomb up] for a dear daughter") and its last line 'pat. f. dul.' ('her father for a dear daughter') suggests that 'f. dul.' ('for a dear daughter') refers only to the *pater*, not to both the couple.

for his son Alcibiades (age 22) and for Iucunda *mater eius* ('his (i.e. the son's) mother') with whom he lived 15 years. If Petronia Nite was Alcibiades' wife at the time of his son's death, this would be a futher case where a stepmother joins with a father in setting up a monument for a stepson; there are, however, difficulties with this interpretation.[15]

(ii) *Tombs set up by or for a stepfather*

Humbert collected 37 examples.[16] In most of these the relationship is described by the unambiguous terms *vitricus* or *privignus/a* (26 examples); in one case (6.14170) two men and a woman set up a tomb for their child and in another (6.29154) a man establishes a tomb for himself, his wife and *filia eius* ('her daughter'). In the remaining inscriptions cited by Humbert, the terms *filiaster* or (once) *patraster* are employed.

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[15] "D.m./Petronia Nite et Alcibiades/ Alcibiadi fil. dulcissimo et/ desiderantissimo cuius mors/ decepit patre suum q.v.a. XX m. vii d. xxi/ et Iucunde matri eius cum qua vix/ a.xv . . . . ." ("to the departed spirit/Petronia Nite and Alcibiades/for Alcibiades, a son dearly-loved and/sadly missed whose death/deceived the hopes of his father: he lived 20 years 7 months 21 days/and for Iucunda his mother, with whom Alcibiades lived/15 years. . . ."). The difficulty is caused by the fact that we have a very similar inscription (6.11373) which shows only the following differences: it is set up by Alcibiades alone, and he is called aug. lib. ('imperial freedman'); after the reference to Iucunda there is an epithet, opt[ima] 'best' and the words sine querella ('without a complaint'). There are two possible scenarios: either Petronia Nite is partner of the imperial slave Alcibiades (or else he has been freed and she is his wife, but if so, why isn't his freedman status mentioned?) and on the death of his son they set up a monument for the son in which Petronia generously includes the mother of the son, the slave Iucunda, who died several years previously. Petronia's name comes first because she is of higher status; perhaps also she paid for the tomb? Later, they separate after becoming estranged and Alcibiades, by now a freedman, has a new tomb made at his expense on which Petronia's name does not appear, and he adds terms of endearment about his first partner. Alternatively, and less probably, the order of the inscriptions may be reversed: Alcibiades, an imperial freedman, sets up a tomb (6.11373) on his own for his son and the son's mother. Later, he marries Petronia Nite and a new version of the inscription is made in which her name is added and the remarks about the wife toned down out of deference to his new wife. But if so why isn't the fact that he is a freedman mentioned, and why wasn't the original inscription destroyed? (in the first scenario, by contrast, an explanation can be found for both inscriptions surviving if it is assumed that the first was paid for by Petronia). If my second explanation is in fact right, Petronia would only be a stepmother in retrospect, i.e. the stepson has died before her marriage. Nonetheless, it is interesting that in either case, Petronia is more generous in allowing endearments about her stepson than she is about the first wife!

[16] For a stepfather: 3.5439., 6.11739, 6.13091, 6.29433., 8.2962., 10.5687., 12.3231, 12.3628, 12.4012., 14.176; by a stepfather: 3.7984., 5.2998., 6.7377, 6.8533, 6.9041, 6.9475, 6.11374, 6.11791, 6.14170, 6.14289, 6.14371, 6.15205, 6.15446, 6.19393,

To Humbert's list can be added six examples involving the use of the terms *vitricus* and *privignus*, which either do not come within the range he was considering[17] or else are omitted.[18] There are also ten inscriptions for *filio eius*, *coniugi eius* etc, which he might have included.[19] It was mentioned earlier that the word *filiaster* is problematical, since it can refer either to a stepchild or to the offspring of an irregular union. Many inscriptions in which the term occurs are omitted by Humbert: some of these, where *filiaster* almost certainly refers to an illegitimate child, rather than a stepchild, are rightly disregarded, for example 6.3477 (for P. Aelius Severus, a Thracian veteran under the emperor Hadrian,[20] by his *filiaster* T. Claudius Severinus and his wife Claudia Elpis), where the son, being illegitimate, has his mother's gentile name but derives his *cognomen* from his father; cf. 15585, 8.2848, and 14.712.[21] I would also omit 6.8533 (included in Humbert's list), where parents refer to their son, an imperial slave, as their *filiaster*.[22] In other cases, however, where evidence is lacking that the child is illegitimate, it can be assumed that *filiaster* has its usual meaning of stepchild; these include 6.13101, 6.13317, 6.16934, 6.23968, 6.26106, 13.1829 and 14.3744.[23] Finally, there are several[24] inscriptions not listed by Humbert where a child referred to as *filiaster* is illegitimate (i.e. is either a slave or has the mother's *nomen* ('family name'), but where it is unclear whether that child is the illegitimate offspring, or the stepchild, of the donor.[25]

6.21554, 6.28376, 6.29154., 8.8937.,10.1303, 10.2862, 10.3013, 10.7642, 10.7668., 13.267, 13.2036., 14. 339, 14.2962. Three of these (6.14371., 19393 and 14. 2962) appear to be wrong references.

[17] i.e. before CIL 6 4600 or after 29600.

[18] i.e. 6.3541, 6.18912, 6.19276, 6.30598, 6.38831; *Not. d. scav.* 1912 p. 158,5.

[19] 6.10163, 10925, 12178, 15408, 21144a, 25062, 26279, 27487, 27949a, as well as 6.20460 (by 2 men and 1 woman for their son, cf. Humbert's 14.170).

[20] As a Thracian recruit, he would have taken his Roman name on enrolling in the army, the *praenomen* and *nomen* deriving from the reigning emperor.

[21] On these see Watson (1989).

[22] "M. Ulpius Aug. lib. Felix... et Ulpia Artemidora fecerunt sibi.... item Agricolae Caesar. n. ser. filiastro suo..." ("Marcus Ulpius Felix, an imperial freedman, and Ulpia Artemidora built this tomb for themselves... likewise for Agricola, an imperial slave, their son" (See Watson (1989), 546f.

[23] 6.34064, which is outside the range of inscriptions used by Humbert, could also be included.

[24] 6.13441, 14047, 14050, 17243, 19412, 22308, 25726, 26271, 28519, 9.4653, 10.7526, 13.2073, *Inscr. christ.* 2714.

[25] E.g. 10.7526, dedicated to his *filiaster* Scribonius Felix, age 16, by the imperial freedman Spatalus: is Felix his illegitimate son by a freeborn or freedwoman, Scribonia,

The meaning of *patraster* is disputed.[26] Humbert accordingly includes only one example, in which the meaning 'stepfather' is likely, namely 10.3013, where a *patraster* and a *mater* ('mother') set up a tomb for their *filius* ('son').[27] In two of the cases omitted by Humbert, the word was understood by Meyer[28] in the sense 'fosterfather': 6.11753, and 10.6983 (where the child (a slave) is referred to as *alumnus* ('nursling'). Likewise in 6.14105, a tomb set up by the boy's young brother, his mother and his *patraster/tutor* ('guardian'), it is not clear whether *patraster* refers to a stepfather.[29]

A total of 57 inscriptions may be listed, then, which in all probability concern a stepfather (12 dedicated to a stepfather and 45 by a stepfather for a stepchild).[30] Another 21 cases, where the terms *filiaster* and *patraster* are employed, must be regarded as uncertain, and have accordingly not been taken into consideration in my discussion in chapter 5.

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or is he his stepson, the offspring of a former union on the part of Spatalus' wife? See Watson (1989), 538.

[26] For instance, Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: 1879) translate it as father-in-law, *OLD* as stepfather; compare the other interpretations discussed below.

[27] All three are of free status; the son's name is different from that of his mother (i.e. he is not illegitimate) but also from that of his *patraster.*

[28] Meyer (1895), 48.

[29] Dixon (1988),167 n. 51 takes it to mean 'uncle'. I have found two other instances of *patraster* (13.1829 and *Inscr. christ.* 2714); as the inscriptions also include the term *filiastra*, they have been mentioned above under that heading.

[30] For a stepfather: 3.5439., 6.11739, 6.13091, 6.26279, 6.29433., 8.2962., 10.5687., 12.3231, 12.3628, 12.4012., 14.176, *Not. d. scav.* 1912 p.158,5.; by a stepfather: 3.7984., 5.2998., 6.3541, 6.7377, 6.9041, 6.9475, 6.10163, 6.10925, 6.11374, 6.11791, 6.12178, 6.13101, 6.13317, 6.14170, 6.14289, 6.15205, 6.15408, 6.15446, 6.16934, 6.18912, 6.19276, 6.20460, 6.21144a, 6.21554, 6.23968, 6.25062, 6.26106, 6.27487, 6.27949a, 6.28376, 6.29154, 6.30598, 6.34064, 6.38831., 8.8937., 10.1303, 10.2862, 10.3013, 10.7642, 10.7668., 13.267, 13.1829, 13.2036., 14. 339 and 14.3744.

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GENERAL INDEX

Acastus, wife of, 22 n. 8, 44 n. 90
Actium, 198, 200, 202, 203 n. 89
Admetus, 7, 54 n. 14
adoption, 61, 65 n. 60, 144f., 150, 171 n. 149, 194, 220
Aegeus, 112 n. 59, 225
Aegisthus, 39 n. 71, 41 n. 81
Aelia Paetina, 142 n. 30, 193
Aeschines, 129 n. 103, 130 n. 107
Agathocles, son of Lysimachus, 210, 218 n. 22
Agave, 24f., 25 n. 18
Agrippa, 135 n. 4, 177f., 180, 186, 198f., 202, 204f.
Agrippa Postumus, 176 n. 2, 177, 179, 180 n. 15, 181–5
Agrippina the Elder, 177 n. 6, 186–90
Agrippina the Younger, 141–6, 176, 177 n. 6, 184, 189 n. 44, 192–7, 209, 218
Alce, 67f.
Alcestis, 7, 9 n. 30, 54 n. 14
Alcmena, 117, 127f., 232, 239
Alexander Helios, 198, 204
Alexander the Great, 129, 210, 211 n. 11, 245
Aloadae, 85f., 89 n. 137, 232, 243f.
Althaea, 24, 85 n. 123
Ammon, 29, 32 n. 46, 231f.
Amphitryon, 39, 41 n. 79, 42 n. 82, 86 n. 126
Anchemolus, 34
Andromache, 21, 23, 28, 29 n. 38, 32 n. 48, 228, 241 n. 6, 245 n. 19, 254f.
Anteia: *see* Stheneboea
Antiochus I, 73 n. 80, 136 n. 7, 214f.
Antiope: 21, 31 n. 45, 32 n. 48, 33, 43, 229, 254f.
Antiphon, half-brother of Plato: 62f.
Antonia the Elder, 199 n. 77, 201 n. 84, 86
Antonia the Younger, 199 n. 77, 201 n. 84
Antonius, M. (Mark Antony), 8 n. 28, 135, 197–204
Antyllus, elder son of Antony and Fulvia, 198–9, 202–4
Apollo, 28, 29 n. 36, 30 n. 41, 35, 85 n. 125, 114, 227, 233, 240, 242 n. 9, 243 n. 14, 244 n. 15
Apollodorus, stepson of Phormio, 68
Apuleius, 156 n. 89, 175, 219
Aquilia, 154
Archelaus, 58, 211 n. 11
Ares, 28, 34, 85 n. 125, 86, 232f., 242f., 244 n. 15
Arsinoe, 210, 218 n. 22
Artemis, 28, 30 n. 41, 114, 233, 240, 244
Asinius Pollio, 103
Astymedusa, 21 n. 7, 30 n. 42, 237
Athamas, 25, 29, 31, 33, 69, 223f., 240 n. 8, 242, 247 n. 27, 248, 250f., 255
Athena, 29, 114 n. 66, 227, 234
Atreus, 28, 30, 38, 226, 245 n. 20
Attia Viriola, 147, 155f., 166 n. 128
Auge, 31 n. 44, 40
Augustan marriage legislation, 9 n. 30, 136 n. 5, 137 n. 11, 148, 149 n. 62, 153 n. 80, 157, 179 n. 12, 219f.
Augustus (Octavian), 141, 143 n. 32, 176–86, 188, 190f., 197–204, 205 n. 95, 206
Aurelius, Marcus, 8, 153 n. 77

Bacchus (see also Dionysus), 114, 117
Battus, 27, 32, 230, 251f.
Bellerophon, 22 n. 8, 44 n. 90, 46 n. 97, 252 n. 43
Boeotus, 70 n. 73, 75
Britannicus, 141–6, 193–7, 209
Brundisium, treaty of, 197, 201 n. 85
Burrus, 146, 195

Caligula, 17 n. 59, 135, 142 n. 29, 191 n. 53
Callipe, 66f.
Callisto, 117 n. 77, 242
Canidia, 15, 157 n. 92
Casperia, 34
Catiline, 14 n. 43
Cato the Censor, 154f.
Chaerestratus, 66f.
Charidemus, 69
Charondas, 6, 18 n. 60, 131 n. 110, 207

Chrysippus, 21, 28, 30, 38, 226, 245 n. 20
Cicero, M., 135 n. 3, 137 n. 10, 151 n. 70, 154, 166 n. 128
Cimon, 60 n. 40, 72 n. 79
Cinderella, 1, 26, 45 n. 96, 48 n. 106, 258f., 261, 262 n. 31, 264 n. 41
Ciron, 51, 63f.
Claudius, 135, 142–6, 184, 192–97
Cleopatra, 198–204
Cleopatra 1, 58, 215 n. 19
Cleopatra Berenice, 58 n. 32, 215 n. 19
Cleopatra Selene, 198f., 202–4
Clytemnestra, 39 n. 71, 41 n. 81, 89 n. 137
Cresphontes, 38 n. 69, 41–2, 85
Creusa, bride of Jason, 7, 9, 92 n. 1
Creusa, mother of Ion, 2, 5 n. 16, 12, 21, 23f., 26, 28f., 32, 35–7, 45 n. 95, 69 n. 70, 227, 241, 246 n. 21, 253, 255, 265
Crispus, 137, 138 n. 13–14
custody of children: in Athens, 50, 80 n. 108, 81 n. 112, 83, 216f.; in Rome, 135, 169f.; among the lower classes, 170f., 172

Danae, 7 n. 25, 40 n. 74
Darius, son of Artaxerxes 2, 73 n. 80, 213 n. 14
declamation: Greek, 129f.; Roman, 2, 14, 14 n. 47, 55 n. 18, 92 n. 3
Deianira, 87, 121–8
Demaenete, 129 n. 106
Demodice, 44 n. 88, 238, 250, 252
Demus, 63
Dictys, 7 n. 25, 40 n. 74
Diocles, 51, 63–5
Diodotus, 52
Diogeiton, 52f., 65
Dionysus, 25, 28f., 30 n. 41, 32 n. 46, 33, 223f., 231–4, 240f., 242 n. 8–9, 243 n. 12, 248 n. 30, 249
Dirce, 21, 31 n. 45, 33, 43, 229, 254
disinherison, 61 n. 44, 93, 133, 146–8, 150f., 155–7, 174 n. 158, 197 n. 69, 219f.
divorce, 1f.; in Athens, 50, 60; in Rome, 135f., 170, 219
Domitia Lepida, 142, 144 n. 39, 195
Domitius Ahenobarbus, L., 142, 199 n. 77
Don Carlos complex, 90 n. 139
Drusus, brother of Tiberius, 145 n. 40, 176 n. 5, 177, 186 n. 39, 197 n. 69, 199 n. 77
Drusus, son of Tiberius, 177, 197 n. 69

Eeriboea, 33 n. 52, 86, 232, 243f., 246
Eidothea: *see* Idaea
Elare, 234, 240
Electra, 41 n. 81
Electra complex, 45 n. 96, 77 n. 97, 258 n. 5, 261 n. 25
Elpinice, 60 n. 40, 72 n. 79
Endeis, 21 n. 7, 30 n. 39, 33, 38, 69 n. 70, 230
Epaphus, 39, 234, 240, 242 n. 10
Ephialtes: see Aloadae
Euctemon, 66–8
Euphiletus, 51f., 66
Euryalus, 21, 25, 29f., 38 n. 70, 226, 253

Fabius Maximus, 182f.
Fannia, 149f.
Fausta, wife of Constantine, 137, 138 n. 13–14, 141 n. 24
Faustina, 8
folktale, 3, 26f., 43–7, 48 n. 106, 78, 107, 134, 208, 250 n. 38, Appendix 3 *passim*
Fulvia, 197f., 202f.
funerary inscriptions, 158–74, 218, Appendix 4

Gaius, grandson of Augustus, 177–80, 193 n. 59, 197 n. 69
Galba, 142 n. 29, 150, 152 n. 77
Gellius Poplicola, L., 135 n. 3, 137
Germanicus, 143, 144 n. 36, 177, 186–9, 193f., 197 n. 69
Grimm's Tales, 258–66 *passim*

Hadrian, 137, 216
Hansel and Gretel, 1, 29, 31, 43, 44, 47, 258, 259 n. 10, 260f.
Hecuba, 244f.
Helen, 34, 245f.
Helle, 23, 30, 32, 208 n. 3, 223f., 247 n. 27, 249, 250 n. 36, 251
Helvia, 8, 149
Hemithea, 30, 48 n. 105, 208 n. 3, 237
Hephaestus, 28, 34, 86 n. 128, 242 n. 9
Hera (*see also* Juno), 25, 28f., 30 n. 41, 33f., 39, 69 n. 70, 86 n. 126 &

128, 113f., 121 n. 91, 128 n. 101, 223, 229, 232–4, 239–43, 244 n. 15, 248 n. 30, 255
Heracles: (*see also* Hercules), 28f., 30 n. 41, 31 n. 44, 34, 39f., 86 n. 126, 121 n. 89, 232f., 239, 241–3, 255
Hercules, 15, 113–28, 166 n. 130, 218
Hermione, 21, 28, 29 n. 38, 32 n. 48, 35 n. 57, 69 n. 70, 227f., 241 n. 6, 245, 246 n. 21, 254f.
Hippodamia, 21, 28, 30, 33, 69 n. 70, 226
Hippolytus, 8, 17, 18 n. 60, 30, 33f., 37, 89, 107 n. 43, 109–12, 113 n. 62 & 64, 167 n. 133, 222 n. 27, 234–6, 244, 252f., 256f.
Horace, 103, 104 n. 37
Hybreas, 103 n. 36, 130
Hyllus, 124f., 126 n. 98, 127f.
Hypsipyle, 8 n. 26, 13, 85 n. 123

Idaea, 26, 30f., 34, 236
incest, 17, 39, 42 n. 83, 45, 65 n. 60, 72, 82f., 137, 139, 215, 256f.
inheritance laws: in Homeric poems, 245f.; in Athens, 54 n. 15, 59–62, 146 n. 51, 212, 220f.; in Rome, 146–8, 152–4, 219–21
Ino, 2, 12f., 23–5, 28, 31, 33, 37 n. 67, 43, 45, 223–5, 240, 242, 247–51
Io, 39, 234, 240, 242, 253
Iole, 121–4, 126, 128
Ion, 5 n. 16, 10 n. 33, 12, 21, 23f., 25, 26 n. 23, 28 n. 32, 29 n. 36, 32, 33 n. 52, 35–7, 45 n. 95, 227, 253, 255, 265
Isocrates, 61 n. 49

Jason, 7, 8 n. 26, 13, 24, 54 n. 14
jealousy, sexual, 28f., 74, 79, 84–6, 120, 121–8, 242f., 245
Julia the Elder, 144 n. 37, 151 n. 70, 176f., 179f., 186, 197f., 204f
Julia the Younger, 189f.
Julius Caesar, 129 n. 104, 135 n. 3–4, 203 n. 91, 204 n. 92
Jullus Antonius, younger son of Antony and Fulvia, 198f.
Junius Silanus, L., 144, 146 n. 47
Juno, 15 n. 48, 29 n. 37, 93, 108, 110, 113–28, 166 n. 130, 232, 241; as *noverca*: a Roman phenomenon, 29 n. 37, 92, 113, 218, 232, 240–3
Jupiter, 110, 115, 117, 118 n. 80, 124f., 127f.

Lamia, 234, 240
Laodice, 210
Learchus, 223f., 248 n. 30
leeches, 56–7
Leto, 28 n. 33, 233, 240, 242
Leucothoe, 33, 223, 248, 251, 255
Lex Falcidia, 147 n. 56, 152
Livia Ocellina, 150
Livia, 92, 141, 151 n. 70, 176–92, 197, 199, 202, 204–6, 218f.
Lollia Paulina, 131, 144 n. 39, 193 n. 58
Lucius, grandson of Augustus, 177–80, 193 n. 59, 197 n. 69

Mantias, 62 n. 50, 70 n. 73
Mantitheus, 70 n. 73 & 75
Marcella, 9 n. 30, 197f., 199 n. 77, 204f.
Marcellus, 144 n. 37, 177, 197, 203f., 206
Medea, 2, 7, 9, 21, 24, 26, 28, 30, 33, 37, 46, 47 n. 100 & 102, 69 n. 70, 85, 87, 92 n. 1, 112f., 225, 241, 247, 255, 265
Megara, 114, 125, 126 n. 98
Melanippe, 28, 89, 231
Melicertes, 223f., 248 n. 30
Menecles, 61
Messalina, 141 n. 24, 142 n. 28 & 30, 143f., 195, 196 n. 65
Metapontus, 28, 231
Minos, 40, 42 n. 82, 85 n. 126
mothers, murderous, 24f., 85; Roman, ambitious for sons, 142, 180 n. 15, 192, 204–6, 221

Narcissus, 193–5, 196 n. 65
Neoptolemus, 21, 32 n. 48, 228, 255
Nephele, 32, 43 n. 87, 45, 223f., 248–50
Nero, 135, 141–6, 169 n. 142, 192–7, 209
noverca, used metaphorically, 4, 12, 16 n. 53; negative associations of, 15f., 104, 166f.
νόθοι, 21 n. 4, 59, 69–71, 211, 245

Octavia, sister of Augustus, 8 n. 28, 9 n. 30, 149f., 176, 192 n. 55, 197–206, 218

Octavia, wife of Nero, 142 n. 30, 144, 146, 193
Octavian: *see* Augustus
Odysseus, 21, 29f., 39 n. 71, 226, 245–7, 256
Oedipus complex, 45f., 48 n. 105, 72 n. 80, 89, 90 n. 139, 209, 216
Olympias, 129, 210, 245
Orestes, 39 n. 71, 41 n. 81
Otus: see Aloadae

Pallas, 143f., 145 n. 40, 196 n. 65
Pasio, 68, 83
Pasiphae, 85 n. 126, 89 n. 137, 109 n. 52, 111 n. 58
Peleus, 22 n. 8, 30 n. 39, 38, 44 n. 90, 230, 242 n. 8, 245 n. 20, 255 n. 56, 262
Penelope, 21, 26, 29f., 33, 38 n. 70, 69 n. 70, 226, 253, 255f.
Periclean citizenship laws, 28 n. 32, 59, 69–71, 211
Perictione, 62, 63 n. 54
Perseus, 40 n. 74, 117, 265
Phaedra, 3, 7 n. 25, 8, 10, 16f., 18 n. 60, 21, 23 n. 11, 25, 30, 33 n. 51, 34, 37, 42, 46 n. 97, 69 n. 70, 72, 89f., 106f., 108–113, 128, 138, 141 n. 24, 167 n. 133, 213f., 218, 234–6, 238, 244, 252f., 255–7, 265, 266 n. 48
Philip 2, 129 n. 105, 210, 215 n. 19, 245 n. 16
Philip Arrhidaeus, 129 n. 105, 210
Philoctemon, 66–8
Philonome, 21, 30, 237f., 253
Phineadae, 21, 26, 30, 33, 34 n. 54, 236f., 253, 255 n. 55
Phineus, 31, 47f., 236f., 255
Phocus, 30 n. 39, 38, 230, 245 n. 20, 255 n. 56, 262
Phoenix, 21, 30, 33, 34 n. 54, 238, 246, 254
Phormio, 68, 81 n. 108, 207 n. 1, 217
Phrixus, 20, 23, 29, 30 n. 43, 32f., 43 n. 87, 44 n. 88, 45, 69, 208 n. 3, 223f., 238, 247–52, 254f.
Phronime, 27, 30, 32, 54 n. 14, 230, 251f., 265f.
Phthia, 21, 69 n. 70, 238, 254
Piso, 186f.
Plancina, 186–8
Plangon, 70 n. 73
Plathane, 61 n. 49
Polydectes, 7 n. 25, 40 n. 74
Polyeuctus, 69, 217 n. 20
Polyphontes, 38 n. 69, 41
Poseidon, 25 n. 20, 28 n. 31, 85 n. 126, 86, 225, 229, 231, 235, 247 n. 27
Potiphar's wife, 22, 43, 44 n. 90, 45, 89, 107 n. 42, 252f., 256, 262f.
Proetus, 22 n. 8, 25 n. 19, 38 n. 69, 44 n. 90
psychoanalysis, 44–6, 81
Ptolemy Philadelphus, son of Antony and Cleopatra, 198, 204
Pyrilampes, 62f.

querela inofficiosi testamenti, 147f., 153 n. 80, 155, 220f.
Quintus, nephew of Cicero, 154
remarriage: threat to children of first marriage, 5–8, 18, 91 n. 143, 152–154, 174, 218, 222; frequency of: in Athens, 50, in Rome, 135f., 169, 219

Rhea, 21 n. 7, 29, 69 n. 70, 231f.

Salmoneus, 22, 24f., 38 n. 69, 228f.
Sassia, 13
Scribonia, 176 n. 4, 177 n. 6, 179 n. 12
Seleucus 1, 214–6
Semele, 85 n. 125, 233f., 240f.
Seneca the Elder, 103
Seneca the Younger, 145, 189 n. 44
Sidero, 3, 11 n. 37, 21f., 25, 27, 31f., 37, 42f., 47, 93, 208, 211, 218, 228f., 253, 263 n. 38, 266
Siris: *see* Theano
Snow White, 1, 26, 27 n. 28–9, 31, 46, 258–60, 261 n. 25, 263, 264 n. 39
step- and half-siblings, conflict between, 38f., 58, 65, 66–8, 71, 79f., 211
stepchildren:
- normally presented as innocent victims, 9f., 18, 32, 33f., 37, 38, 42, 88, 106, 210 n. 9, 213, 216, 222, 244
- show hostility towards step-parent, 9 n. 32, 52–4, 57f., 65–8, 71, 76–80, 100f., 151f., 154f., 156 n. 89, 175, 213
- show coolness in relationship with stepmother, 163, 168, 173f.

stepdaughters:
- cruel treatment of, 2 n. 7, 3,

11 n. 37, 18, 22, 25–7, 31, 32 n. 48, 37, 51–4, 132, 147, 208, 211, 218, 266
relationship with stepmother especially difficult, 51, 77, 81, 84, 165f–7, 175
resent stepmothers, 52–4, 66, 71, 165f., 174, 179, 213
stepfamily, contemporary, 73–84, 151, 165, 174 n. 156, 175 n. 160, 211–13
stepfathers: 39–42, 79–82, 85f., 153 n. 81, 158f., 169–74, 216f.
lack negative image, 39–42, 80f., 85f., 156 n. 89, 207 n. 1, 209 n. 4, 216f., 219
relations with more cordial than with stepmothers, 172–3
'wicked', 41f., 68f., 71, 79, 83, 85, 175, 217
stepmother theme:
in Atellan Farce, 16, 133, 138
in Attic Tragedy, special prominence of: 20f., 49f., 91, 209, Appendix 2
in declamation, 14, 92–104, 107, 108, 111, 128–31, 134, 136, 208 n. 3, 217, 219
in Fabula Togata, 10, 16, 131f., 138, 208 n. 3
in Mime, 10, 16, 131, 133, 138
Roman obsession with, 2f., 13, 15f., 18, 92, 135, 174, 207, 219
stepmothers:
amorous, 3, 14 n. 45, 16–18, 21–3, 25, 30, 33f., 45–8, 71f., 82, 89f., 93, 105–7, 109–113, 129, 132–4, 136–9, 208, 213–6, 234–8, 246, 250, 252f., 256f.
anonymous, 55 n. 18, 93, 107, 217, 265
characteristics ascribed to: jealousy, 21, 25–9, 34, 40, 42, 54, 74, 79, 81 n. 111, 84–6, 118–20, 125f., 195; lack of self-control, 25f., 42, 84, 87–89, 120; treacherousness, 29f., 84, 86f., 98, 109, 120, 179–80, 182–3, 185, 187f., 192, 194f., 225
childless, 94f., 150 n. 66, 158, 164f., cf.173f.
contrasted with mother, 3f., 16 n. 53
good, 8f., 23, 94–5, 149–50, 161, 176, 197–206, 218, 258
hatred of stepchild: caused by jealousy over inheritance issue, 2 n. 7, 11., 18, 28, 29 n. 35, 33, 47, 54, 93–5, 105 n. 40, 119, 141–6, 158, 174, 176f., 179, 208f., 217; regarded as inevitable, 3–5, 23–5, 95, 100, 207; sociological / psychological basis for, 74–7, 212f.
misogyny underlying stereotype, 2, 84–91, 175, 216, 218, 22
murderous, 12–15, 23, 54–62, 97, 102f., 140f., 150, 176f., 208–211, 223–34, 244
in myth, ch. 2 *passim*, 51, 58–62, 71, 93, 143, 208, Appendix 1, Appendix 2 poison associated with, 2, 14, 55, 93–6, 97 n. 19, 98, 104f., 106f., 133f., 174, 176, 180, 186, 188 n. 43, 196, 217
prejudice against, 52 n. 8, 53, 65, 72–4, 91, 157, 175, 218, 222
scapegoat for stepfamily conflicts, 32, 38–42, 77–84, 175, 207f., 211f., 222
stereotype of wicked stepmother, 1, 22–5, 33–7, 42, 73, 78, 96–7, 99f., 102, 104f., 111–13, 117, 141 n. 25, 176f., 192, 197, 205, 222;
symbol for negative side of mother, 20, 42–48, 105, 209
sympathy for, 10f., 23 n. 11, 34–7, 101, 109, 111, 113, 235f.
unsuccessful, 31–3, 42, 265
victims of stereotype, 1f., 10f., 76, 80, 141, 222
witchcraft associated with, 1, 16f., 95, 102 n. 31, 109, 218 n. 21, 256, 260f., 265
stepson, amorous, 34, 72 n. 80, 82, 93 n. 6, 133, 137–9, 212 n. 13, 214–6
Stheneboea, 22 n. 8, 37, 46 n. 97, 252 n. 43
Stratonice, 73 n. 80, 136 n. 7, 214f.
Sulla, 135, 150, 169 n. 142

Tarentum, Peace of, 198, 200 n. 82, 201, 205 n. 96
Telamon, 30 n. 39, 38, 40, 230, 245 n. 20, 255 n. 56, 262
Telemachus, 29 n. 35, 30, 38 n. 70, 226, 256

Tennes, 21, 30, 32 n. 48, 48 n. 105, 208 n. 3, 237f., 254
The Story of Two Brothers, 44 n. 89, 46 n. 97, 263, 266 n. 48
Theano (=Siris), 28, 32, 231, 254
Themisto, 21, 23, 28, 31f., 45 n. 95, 47 n. 102, 85 n. 123, 224f., 248, 250, 251 n. 39, 253, 265f.
Theseus, 7 n. 25, 10 n. 33, 21, 25, 30, 32, 33 n. 52, 40, 46, 89, 110f., 112 n. 59, 113 n. 62–3, 225, 234–6, 247, 255–7, 262, 265
Thyestes, 28, 30, 38, 226
Tiberius, 142, 144 n. 37, 145 n. 40, 176f., 179–83, 184 n. 27 & 30, 185–91, 197 n. 69, 204
Tityos, 234, 240
Tyro, 11 n. 37, 21f., 24f., 27, 32 n. 48, 33, 37, 43, 47, 51 n. 3, 208, 228f., 253, 255, 263 n. 38, 266

Valeria, daughter of Diocletian, 150
Virgil, 103

women:
  characteristics of: jealousy, 84–6, 187, 195, 222; lack of self-control, 88f., 127f., 222; treacherousness, 86f., 175 n. 163, 182 n. 20, 222
  poison associated with, 87, 175 n. 163, 206 n. 100
  sexuality of, 83f., 87–90, 157, 175, 216, 219

Xuthus, 28 n. 32, 35f., 227, 255

Zagreus, 234
Zeus, 28 n. 33, 34, 39f., 85 n. 125, 86 n. 126 & 128, 121 n. 91, 229, 232–4, 239–43, 248, 253

INDEX OF PASSAGES DISCUSSED

Aesch., *Pers.* 70: 247 n. 27; *PV* 727: 4
Aesop 121: 3f.
Aethiopis, *EGF* p. 47: 86 n. 128
Afranius, *Divortium*: 132f., 138, 208 n. 3; *Privignus*: 132
Alexis, *PCG* fr. 150.7f.: 84f.
Antiphon 1: 55, 58 n. 30
AP 3.4: 34. n. 54, 237; 3.9: 25 n. 21, 228; 9.23: 4; 9.67: 13
Ap. Rhod., *Argon.* 1.268–72: 54 n. 14; 1.813–5: 13, 54 n. 14
Apollod., 1.7.4: 86, 232, 244 n. 15; 2.1.3: 234; 2.4.9: 39 n. 73; 3.5.5: 85 n. 123; 3.15.4: 25 n. 20
Appian *B.Civ.* 5.95: 201 n. 86; *Syr.* 59–61: 214
Apul. *Apol.* 71: 156 n. 89; *Met.* 9.14ff.: 107f.; 10.2: 107 n. 43; 10.2–12: 105–7, 134 n. 123
Ar., *Eccl.* 225: 88; 237f.: 86f.; 133f.: 88; 706ff.: 88; *Thesm.* 430: 87; 549f.: 89
Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.1ff.: 84f.
Artemidorus, *Oneiro.* 3.26: 4 n. 11, 16 n. 53; 4.20: 73 n. 80
Asclepiades of Tragilos, *FGrH* 12F28: 89 n. 138, 256

Callim., *Hymn* 4: 55ff.: 28 n. 33, 242 n. 9
Calp., *Decl.* 22: 93 n. 6, 95 n. 15, 136 n. 7; 35: 96f.
Catull., 64.401f.: 14 n. 45, 112 n. 60, 136f., 139 n. 19; 64.402: 92 n. 1; 64.403: 157 n. 91
Cic., *Att.* 14.17.3: 154; *Clu.* 27: 14 n. 43, 136 n. 8; 199: 13
CIL **2**.820: 267; 871: 162 n. 116, 168 n. 138, 267 n. 2, 268 n. 9; 5008: 163 n. 118, 166f., 267; **3**.5439: 164 n. 118, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 7984: 173 n. 155, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 8821: 267 n. 2; **6**.3477: 270; 3541: 173 n. 155, 271 n. 30; 4566: 168, 162 n. 114, 267 n. 4, 268; 5600: 267 n. 4 & 6, 268; 6713: 162 n. 114, 163, 168 n. 138, 268; 7527: 164 n. 118, 168 n. 138, 267 n. 2, 268; 8533: 164 n. 118, 270; 9041: 171 n. 147, 173 n. 155, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 9108: 164 n. 119, 168, 267; 10163: 171 n. 148, 270 n. 19, 271 n. 30; 10925: 171 n. 148, 270 n. 19, 271 n. 30; 11373: 269 n. 15; 11472: 162 n. 114, 168, 267 n. 4, 268; 11816: 163, 267; 14105: 271; 14170: 170, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 14367: 165 n. 126, 167 n. 135, 267; 15205: 164 n. 118, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 15993: 267 n. 4, 268; 19846: 2647 n. 7; 20460: 171 n. 147, 270 n. 19, 271 n. 30; 22715: 164 n. 119, 168, 267; 23342: 165 n. 123, 168, 267 n. 4, 268; 24043: 162 n. 116, 168, 267 n. 5, 268f.; 24805: 162 n. 114, 168, 267 n. 5, 268, 269 n. 15; 25257: 267 n. 5; 25283: 162 n. 114, 267 n. 4, 268; 26211: 165 n. 123, 168 n. 138, 267 n. 2, 268 n. 9; 29154: 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 29679: 167 n. 135, 267; 30123: 167; **8**.8937: 171 n. 149, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; **9**.2095: 162 n. 114, 165 n. 123, 168, 267 n. 2, 268 n. 9; **10**.590: 267 n. 4, 268; 3013: 270 n. 16, 271; 5687: 172, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 6983: 271; 7526: 270 n. 24–5; **11**.6730,4: 166 n. 130; **12**.810: 140f., 167; **13**.2036: 171 n. 149, 173 n. 154, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; **14**.339: 173 n. 155, 269 n. 16, 271 n. 30; 5176: 163 n. 118, 164 n. 119, 267
Claud., *Bell. Gil.* 1.173f.: 14 n. 46; 3.40: 4
Colum., 10.163: 16 n. 53

De Physiognomonia Liber 4: 84 n. 121
Dem., 36 & 45 & 46: 68, 81 n. 108, 83; 39–40: 62 n. 50; 45.3–4: 68 n. 68; 57.20: 60; 57.37: 62 n. 50; 57.41 & 43: 51
[Dem.], 40.2: 70 n. 73, 75; 48.10: 66; 58: 68f., 211, 217 n. 20
Dig. 34.4.31.2: 155 n. 86; 48.9.1: 208 n. 2; 48.9.5: 137, 216
Dio Cass., 48.54.5: 198, 201 n. 87; 49.33.4: 198, 202; 50.26.1–2: 200 n. 80; 51.15.6–8: 199, 204; 53.33.4: 177 n. 7; 54.35.5: 199 n. 77, 200

n. 81; 55.32.2: 176 n. 2; 57.3.6: 185 n. 32; 58.2.1–6: 191 n. 51–2; 61.31.8: 143 n. 33; 61.32.5–6: 145 n. 43; 61.33.10: 145 n. 43; 61. 34.1–2: 145 n. 44–5, 196 n. 68
Diod Sic., 12.12–14: 6f., 18 n. 60; 12.14: 131 n. 110; 4.68: 27 n. 27, 228f.; 20.33.5, 68.3: 213 n. 14

Euripides, *Aegeus*: 3 n. 8, 20 n. 2, 37; *Alcestis* 305–10: 7; 313–9: 54 n. 14; *Alcmaeon at Corinth*: 27 n. 27, 231 n. 12; *Alcmene*: 85 n. 126; *Andromache*: 70 n. 74, 227f.; 85: 87 n. 131; 224: 23, 245 n. 19; 353f.: 84; 911f.: 84; *Antiope*: 20 n. 2, 37, 229, 254; *Bacchae* 9:233, 241; *Cretans*: 85 n. 126; *Cyclops* 3: 233, 240; *Dictys*: 7 n. 25; *Electra* 17 & 25–28 & 34–8: 41 n. 81; *Heracles*: 39, 114; first *Hippolytus*: 3 n. 8, 20 n. 2, 37, 234f.; 2nd *Hippolytus*: 23 n. 11, 33 n. 51, 110 n. 54, 235f.; 616ff.: 112 n. 61; 858ff.: 7 n. 25; *Ino*: 20 n. 2, 37, 253; *Ion*: 5 n. 16, 21 n. 4, 70 n. 74, 227, 253; 354: 26 n. 23; 607–20: 35; 611: 36; 616f.: 36 n. 63; 817ff.: 35; 843–6: 84; 859–922: 35 n. 58; 864:20, 29 n. 36; 925–69: 35 n. 58; 987ff.: 35; 1024ff: 12, 36 n. 62; 1261ff.: 36; 1270: 36 n. 64; 1279: 36 n. 64; 1329: 12 n. 39, 36 n. 64; *Medea* 263–6: 84f.; *Melanippe Desmotis*: 20 n. 2, 37, 254; *Meleager*: 24 n. 16; *Peleus*: 22 n. 8; *Phineus*: 37; *Phoenix*: 3 n. 8, 20 n. 2, 37, 238; *Phrixus*: 20 n. 2, 37, 223; *Stheneboea*: 37; *Tennes*: 20 n. 2, 237, 254; *TGF*[2] F288: 87 n. 132; *TGF*[2] F 824: 13, 69, 223

Festus, p. 184 Th p. 174 M: 15

Gaius, *Dig.* 5.2.4: 155

Heliod., *Aeth.*: 16 n. 54, 107 n. 42, 129f.; 1.9: 17 n. 58
Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 29: 34; F 157: 21 n. 6, 28 n. 30, 226
Herodotus 7.197: 224, 251f.
Hesiod, *Op.* 60–8: 86; 182ff.: 92 n. 1; 823–5: 3; *Theog.* 314f.: 233, 239; frg. 10 (a) 20–23: 256 n. 58
Hom., *Iliad* 5.69: 23; 5.385ff.: 232, 243; 9.437ff.: 238, 246; 14.292ff.: 86 n. 128; 14.313ff.: 128 n. 101, 239; 15.18–24: 128 n. 101, 233; 15.24ff.: 239; 18: 86 n. 128; 18.119: 239; 19.90ff.: 239; *Od.* 1.429f.: 246; 11.305ff.: 86 n. 127, 244 n. 15
Hor., *Epod.* 5.9: 14f., 69–70; 12: 157 n. 92; *Odes* 3.24: 11f., 104
Hyg., *Fab.* 63: 40 n. 74; 85: 38, 266; 122: 39 n. 71; 186: 28 n. 31; *Met. Cast.* 57: 4 n. 12
[Hyg.] *Astr.* 2.20: 44 n. 88, 238, 250
Hymn. Hom. Ap. 100: 242

Isaeus 2: 61; 3: 70 n. 75; 6: 66–8, 70 n. 75; 7: 61, 81 n. 108; 8: 63–5, 70 n. 75; 8.40–1: 65; 12: 51, 54 n. 13, 66, 70 n. 75; 12.5: 52

Jerome *Ep.* 54.15.4: 10f., 131
Justin, 10.1: 73 n. 80, 213 n. 14; 27.1.1–2: 210 n. 9
Justinian, *Codex* 3.28.22: 147 n. 54; 6.2.11: 148 n. 60, 151 n. 72, 166 n. 128; 7.34.1: 151 n. 72, 166 n. 128; 8.47(48).5: 151 n. 69; 9.22.4 (3): 151 n. 73; 9.32.3: 151 n. 72, 166 n. 128; 9.33.5: 151 n. 72, 166 n. 128
Juv., 6.627: 2 n. 7, 14

Laberius *Belonistria*: 133, 138
Libanius, *Decl.* 49: 129, 93 n. 4
Luc., 5.764: 170 n. 144
Lucian *Abdicatus*: 90, 93 n. 4
Lys., 19.22: 62 n. 50; 32: 52–4, 65, 66 n. 61

Macrobius 1.24.7: 86 n. 128
Mart., 4.16: 138f.
Menander *Mon.* 189: 131 n. 110, *Phasma*: 130f. n. 110, 132

Not. d. scav. 1923: 162 n. 114, 168, 267 n. 4, 268 n. 9; 1925: 162 n. 114, 267 n. 4, 268

Ov., *Ars* 2.217: 114 n. 65, 233 n. 15, 240; *Ep.* 4: 110; 4.140: 8; 6.126: 8 n. 26, 14 n. 44; 9.8: 114 n. 65; 12.187f.: 7, 92 n. 1; *Fast.* 3.769 & 6.800: 114 n. 65; *Met.* 1.144ff.: 11, 14, 92 n. 1, 104, 112 n. 60, 134 n. 124; 2.508ff.: 114 n. 67; 2.513:

117 n. 77; 2.550ff.: 243 n. 14; 4.538ff.: 243 n. 13; 6.336: 114; 9.15: 114 n. 65; 9.135: 114 n. 65; 9.181: 114 n. 65; 15.499ff.: 109
Oxyrhynchus Mime: 133 n. 120

Parthen., *Amat. Narr.* 3: 30, 226
Paus., 2.29.9–10: 38, 230
Pherec., *FGrH* 3F69: 39 n. 73
Philostratus *Vit.Soph.* 1.481: 129
Pind., *Nem.* 1.33ff.: 233, 239
Plato, *Leg.* 781a: 86; 930b: 5f., 91 n. 143, 207; *Menex.* 237b.7: 4
Plaut., *Pseud.* 314: 12; *Stich.* 108ff.: 154 n. 82
Plin., *Ep.* 6.33: 146–8, 155f., 181 n. 17; 7.19: 149; 9.13: 149f.; *Nat.* 7.1.1: 4; 17.18: 4
Plut., *Alex.* 77.5: 129 n. 105, 210 n. 10; *Ant.* 31.2: 205 n. 98; 35.2: 201; 35.8: 201; 53.1–4: 198 n. 74; 54.3–4: 202; 87: 205; 87.2: 202 n. 88; *Cat. Mai.* 24: 71 n. 76, 154f.; *Cic.* 41.5: 151 n. 70; *Comparison of Aristides and Cato* 6: 154; *Demetr.* 38: 214; 839B: 61 n. 49; 839d: 62 n. 50; *Sull.* 2: 150; *Them.* 32: 60
Pollux, 4.141: 22
Pomponius, *Praeco Posterior*: 133, 138
POxy XXVII no. 2455 fr. 14 col. xiii lines 179–80: 237 n. 24; XXVII no. 2455 fr.17 col. xix line 272: 224 n. 3; LII no. 3652: 223
Prop., 2.1.51f: 17 n. 57, 109, 256; 4.5.10: 4; 4.9.44: 114; 4.11.86: 9

Quint., *Decl.* 246: 95f.; 327: 10 n. 34, 93–5, 102 n. 30; 338: 93 n. 7, 146 n. 50; 350: 95 n. 13, 96 n. 18; 373: 100–102; *Inst.* 2.4.41: 129 n. 103
[Quint.], *Decl.* 1: 98 n. 21, 102; *Decl.* 2: 93 n. 7–8, 98 n. 21, 102, 129, 146, 149 n. 62

S.H.A. *Marc.* 29.10: 8, 153 n. 77
Sall., *Cat.* 15: 14 n. 43, 136 n. 8
Schol. Pind., *Pyth.* 4.288: 30 n. 43, 238, 248–51
Schol. Theoc. 2.10: 256
Sen. *Con.* 2.6.3: 93 n. 7, 146 n. 50; 4.5: 10, 101 n. 28, 103, 129; 4.6: 4f., 95 n. 12; 6.7: 17 n. 58, 93 n. 6, 136 n. 7; 7.1: 98 n. 22, 146 n. 50, 149 n. 62; 7.1.22: 103; 7.5: 98; 9.5: 97f.; 9.6: 93 n. 9, 99f.; 9.6.6: 9 n. 29; fr. 1: 93 n. 6, 136 n. 7
Sen. *ad Marc.* 2.3–5: 204 n. 94; *Helv.* 2.4: 8f., 149, 218 n. 23; *Her.F.* 114–20, 126–8; prologue: 114–20; 21: 122 n. 93; 34ff.: 119 n. 81; 35: 120 n. 84; 57ff.: 118 n. 78; 64f.: 115 n. 68; 75: 120 n. 84; 77: 120 n. 84; 85: 120 n. 83; 101ff.: 120 n. 85; 116: 120 n. 83; 595ff.: 118; 600ff.: 118; 609f.: 118; 632ff.: 119 n. 82; 895f.: 119 n. 82; 926–7: 118 n. 80; 1236: 15; *Her. Oet.* 120–8; prologue: 121f.; 64ff.: 126 n. 98; 227–32: 124 n. 95; 233ff.: 122f.; 241ff.: 122; 250: 124 n. 95; 257–65: 123; 269–75: 125; 284f.: 123; 313: 125; 340ff.: 123; 345–49: 126; 429ff.: 125; 700ff. 124 n. 96; 705: 124 n. 95; 707ff.: 124; 842–884: 124; 852: 125; 880ff.: 126; 934–982: 124; 984–1024: 124; 1179ff.: 127; 1186ff.: 126; 1264ff.: 127; 1277: 128 n. 100; 1316ff.: 122; 1354: 127; 1356: 127f.; 1455: 123; 1674–5: 128; *Med.* 845ff.: 7 n. 26, 9, 92 n. 1; *Phaed.* 110–13; 165ff.: 111 n. 58; 353ff.: 17, 93 n. 6; 356f.: 111; 483ff: 111f.; 559: 222; 559ff.: 112 n. 61; 608: 167 n. 133; 638: 111; 684: 112f.; 696f.: 113; 1191–2: 113; 1199f.: 113 n. 63
*SIG*³ 1168.13: 55–7
Sophocles, *Aegeus*: 20 n. 2, 52; *Antigone* 970ff.: 26, 236; *Creusa*: 227, 253 n. 49; *Euryalus*: 20 n. 2, 226, 253; *Phaedra*: 20 n. 2, 234f.; *Phineus*: 20 n. 2, 26 n. 24, 236f.; *Phoenix*: 20 n. 2, 238; *Phrixus*: 20 n. 2; *Trachiniae* 497ff.: 121 n. 89; 860f.: 121 n. 89; 1048: 121 n. 91; *Tympanistae*: 20 n. 2, 26 n. 24; *Tyro*: 3 n. 8, 20 n. 2, 37, 228, 253; *TrGF* IV F 648: 27 n. 28; 658: 27 n. 28; 659: 22 n. 9–10
Stat., *Silv.* 2.1.49: 14 n. 44, 46; 5.2.80: 14 n. 46
Stob., Vol. 4 p. 154WH: 6 n. 19
Suet., *Cal.* 7: 189; 23.2: 191 n. 53; *Nero* 6.4: 144 n. 36; 7.1: 195 n. 64; *Tib.* 22: 185 n. 30 & 32; 52: 186 n. 35

Tac., *Ann.* 1.3.3: 178, 185, 187 n. 40, 190 n. 49; 1.3.3–4: 179f.; 1.4–5: 181–4; 1.7: 185; 1.10.5: 176, 185; 1.33: 186f.; 2.43: 187; 2.69ff.: 187; 2.71: 186; 2.82.1: 188; 3.17.2: 188; 4.12.3: 189; 4.71.4: 190 n. 49; 5.1.2: 190–2; 5.3.1: 189f.; 11.11.3: 144 n. 36; 12.1–2: 143 n. 33, 192f.; 12.2.1–3: 193f.; 12.22: 144 n. 39; 12.25: 145 n. 40, 194; 12.26.2: 145, 194 n. 62; 12.41: 194f.; 12.59: 144 n. 39, 195; 12.64.2: 195 n. 64; 12.65.2–3: 195f.; 12.66–9: 196f.

Theocritus, *Id* 8.15–16: 105

Thuc., 1.9: 38, 226

Tibullus 2.3.24: 114

Titinius, *Insubra*: 131f.; *Privigna*: 132

Val. Max., 7.7.4: 156f., 160 n. 104, 175 n. 163, 219 n. 24; 9.1.9: 14 n. 43

Vell. Pat., 2.4.4: 16 n. 53

Virg., *Aen.* 7.765f.: 109, 236; 8.288: 113, 241; 8.370ff.: 86 n. 128; 10.389: 34; *Ecl.* 3: 103 n. 32; 3.33f.: 105; *Georg.* 2.128: 13f., 69; 3.282f.: 16, 55 n. 18; 102 n. 31

Xenophon of Ephesus *Ephesiaca* 2.3–6: 107 n. 42